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The Coldest Man in Florida

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THIS APOLLO HATED ALL WOMAN-KIND, BUT FORTUNATELY FOR HIM THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN THE COUNTY WAS AN ATHENA

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IT was a rainy day in Vingo, Florida. Rain had been leaking down from sour gray clouds for the better part of a week. The drainage ditches were full. The swamps were higher than they had been all summer, and the rain frogs were shrilling with unabated optimism.

No. 29 had just come and gone, snatching the mail sack from the crane and dropping the Northern sack in a puddle which Buck Henifer could reach only by wading through larger puddles.

I suppose there is a Buck Henifer in every small town. He was the handy man of Vingo—the postmaster, the notary public, the game warden, and the deputy sheriff. When he was not engaged in the discharge of his various official duties, he was weighing out corn meal, grits, sugar, and white salt bacon in the Vingo commissary. His office was the Vingo post office, which was situated behind a partition in the rear of

the commissary. Here, sooner or later, came all the news of the section that was fit to listen to, and some that was not. The Vingo commissary was the central office, so to speak, of a grapevine telegraph that poked its tendrils into every cypress swamp and pine hammock of two hundred square miles of the Florida East Coast hinterland.

Vingo was a settlement in the heart of a rich and undeveloped area of hammock land dotted with swamps. It was divided into halves by the brave steel rails of the Florida East Coast Railroad. On one side of the tracks were the whites, a dozen of them, and on the other were the quarters where fifty negro families lived on in the hope that Vingo would some day realize a long cherished dream. The heads of these black families sought employment only in times of acute economic necessity.

Vingo had been launched with brass bands and fireworks as a city, the potential

center of a great farming country; but all the young men went to war and never returned, the paint scaled off, the roofs fell in, and the jungles crept up and reclaimed what had for centuries been theirs. Vingo continued to survive through sheer obstinacy and the fitful assistance of small, scattered industries.

Off in the pine hammocks were turpentine stills, tie camps, a few cracker farms, and a shingle mill. A mile in the other direction, on the old King's Highway, some plucky Frenchmen were raising pecans, peaches, and kumquats; over on the alligator-infested Majolica River lived a mysterious farmer, Harry Zorn, who did not farm; and from the Vingo siding a spur ran down to a quarry where coquina rock was mined.

The quarry land extended north from the edge of Zorn's property to a road running east from Vingo to the Dixie Highway. Not counting the railroad, this pair of ruts ballasted with yellow rock that ran through swamp and hammock to the Dixie was Vingo's only avenue of communication with the outside world.

Benjamin Kalo Harper was the owner of the quarry. The rains had flooded his pits, making it impossible to get out rock, and the quarry was shut down. He was spending the afternoon with Buck Henifer when Ophelia Bartrom picked her way delicately over the grass and entered his life.

II

OPHELIA BARTROM was the most beautiful girl in the world. The proof is unassailable. Ophelia was the most beautiful girl in Vingo County. The girls of Vingo County are admitted to be the most beautiful girls in the State of Florida; and the girls of Florida are the most beautiful girls in the world, all protests from California to the contrary notwithstanding.

Ophelia was far and away superior as scenery to the most enchanting view from any porch or window. To give you the barest of details, she was slender, blue-eyed, golden-haired, and appealingly young. One glimpse of her ankles would have sent Flo Ziegfeld rushing out to mortgage Times Square.

During her first week in Florida, Ophelia declined five offers of marriage. She had grown so used to the adoration of men that she took it for granted—until she met Benjamin Kalo Harper.

Mr. Harper was as dark as Ophelia was blond. He had thick, curly dark hair and wistful hazel eyes. His countenance was dark, rather sad, and very handsome. On the afternoon of their meeting he looked as if he had just emerged from the studio door of a motion-picture plant where they were doing Western stuff. The truth was that he had selected his costume with the end in view of living comfortably with the blazing sun, the chilly evenings, the guinea wasps, and the swift striking snakes of the Florida swamps.

He wore a flat, black sombrero, a green plaid woolen shirt, corduroy riding breeches, and cordovan puttees that he kept in such a glistening state of perfection that Buck Henifer accused him of using them to shave by.

Around his lean and muscular waist he wore a bullet belt, and supported by this bullet belt was a black and businesslike forty-four gun, an heirloom. It had once crossed the prairies in a covered wagon. He took more pride in keeping his personal artillery bright and clean and well oiled than most men show in their motor cars.

Ben Harper was standing on the commissary porch, lounging against one of the palm boles which served as roofposts, a cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth, the black sombrero tilted over one eye, when Ophelia walked into view from behind the little yellow railroad station. Tethered to a post behind him was his saddle mule.

Now, women are baffling creatures and subject to queer and mysterious impulses; but it is reasonably safe to assume that Ophelia had not seen Ben when she stopped in the grass and gazed off prettily toward Little Cypress Swamp. She had been in Florida only a week or so, and Little Cypress on a rainy afternoon was not to be taken lightly.

The cypress trees had all been drowned during high water a few years before, and the stumps now stood up like the gnarled and twisted fingers of giants' hands. A mist like blue steam struggled up from the black water, and rain came slanting down in silver streaks. The blue mist was mysterious, and the scene was one of desolate beauty.

That was Benjamin Harper's first glimpse of the most beautiful girl in the world, as she stood there and gazed at the swamp with an expression of sweet girlish sorrow.

If it was a pose, it was a mighty effective one.

Harper straightened up, gazed over at Little Cypress to see what she found there to interest her so, and looked back at her with slightly narrowed eyes.

Ophelia was wearing a long, glossy yellow slicker and no hat, and she carried in one beautiful white hand a bright blue umbrella. The colors were startling against the dismal gray background, and extremely pleasing, as far as Buck Henifer was concerned.

There were drops of rain sparkling on the tips of her lashes, and her cheeks were deeply pink from the long walk from the house of Angelica Boggs, her cousin. Angelica was the richest young woman in Vingo, having been very fortunate in Florida real estate speculations. In fact, she owned most of Vingo.

Suddenly something began to happen that Buck Henifer did not understand. One moment Ophelia was gazing with sad and dreamy eyes and rosy cheeks at Little Cypress; the next, she was staring at her feet, and all of the color had left her face.

Out of the tail of his eye Buck Henifer noticed that Harper had snapped to attention. He had snapped not only to attention, but as promptly into action.

The postmaster, notary public, game warden, and deputy sheriff of Vingo released his breath with the violence of the north wind as he saw his companion whip his revolver out of its holster. He did not know the quarryman well, and he believed the young fellow had suddenly lost his reason. For a horrible few seconds Buck Henifer thought that Ben had fired point-blank at Ophelia!

It flashed through Buck's mind as the girl swayed that he was at last to have his lifelong dream realized, and become the star witness in a spectacular murder trial. But she didn't fall. She only swayed and looked sicker than before.

Harper was saying in a low, courteous voice:

"That kind don't rattle, madam. They simply strike."

"Shoot it again!" she wailed.

"It is quite dead, I assure you."

At Ophelia's feet, now writhing in its death agonies, was a plump four-foot ground rattler. Ben had broken its backbone twice, once with each shot. Out West

they might not rate that as fancy shooting, but you must bear in mind that in Florida a six-shooter is seldom used except to slaughter a razorback for Sunday dinner, or to wave innocently in the face of a man when you cannot convince him orally that he is in the wrong.

He dropped the revolver back into the holster.

"Well," he said very casually to the storekeeper, "I guess I'll be ambling back to camp. See you later, Buck. So long."

And, swinging into the saddle, he cantered off into the rain as jauntily as if—well, as jauntily as if he had not saved the life of the most beautiful girl in the world by shooting to death with neatness and dispatch a rattlesnake coiled in the road at her slender feet!

Ophelia proceeded uncertainly to the porch, dropped the blue umbrella to the floor, and leaned against the post Ben had just left. She was still pale, and there were little drops of moisture about her lovely mouth.

She clung to the post and looked off in the direction that Mr. Harper had taken, and presently her trembling stopped. She appeared baffled. No doubt it was a novel experience, having any man treat her with such indifference.

"Is James Cruze putting on a sequel to the 'Covered Wagon'?" Ophelia inquired in a faint voice.

"The gentleman's name," Buck answered, "is Mr. Benjamin K. Harper. I reckon he's been everywhere and seen everything—"

"And left his book of etiquette at home," Ophelia finished. "He saved my life from a reptile, and didn't have the decency to apologize for frightening me out of a year's growth, or the common humanity to wait and be thanked."

"Everybody kills snakes every day in Vingo," Henifer explained, deprecatingly.

"I've got the blues, Buck," Miss Bartrom asserted. "I've been playing the phonograph until my nerves are in tatters. The only fox trot Angelica owns is 'Dardanella,' and it sounds like cats having a race on a tin roof. Tell me something about Harper."

"Well," Buck replied, cautiously, "he is twenty-five years old and a first-class fellow. He was in the rock business up in Ohio with his father until the old man died about a year ago. He pays his com-

missary bills on the dot. He's pleasant spoken, but right to the point. He's been havin' a pretty hard time makin' a go of the quarry. He comes up and chews the rag with me when he gets lonely. Handsome lookin' boy, ain't he?"

Ophelia narrowed her eyes and nibbled at her lower lip, reserving judgment.

"Married?"

"Shucks, no."

"Well, he certainly doesn't seem to like women," said Ophelia. "And if he doesn't, I think I'll pack up and go home. I could fall in love with that man without the slightest effort. Will you give me something to do to take my mind off the way he insulted me? Can't I sort out some more parcel post C. O. D's?"

"You bet," said Buck.

He was out in the store, sadly checking over some dead accounts, and Ophelia was back in the post office, sorting out unclaimed parcel post C. O. D's, when a mule came splashing through the rain.

Ben Harper walked in and slung down his black sombrero on the counter.

"Who was that girl?" he wanted to know.

"Her name," Buck told him, "is Ophelia Bartrom."

"How long has she been in Vingo?"

"A week or so."

"Where's she from?"

"Chicago. It's too bad," said Buck, playfully, "you didn't wait and let me introduce you. She was sorry you were in such a hurry. You made a great hit with her."

Ben Harper was not smiling.

"She's pretty, isn't she?" said Buck. He was a sentimental, middle-aged bachelor, and he believed he sensed a romance.

"I didn't notice," said Ben Harper.

"Huh! You just don't like women."

Harper's large, brown hands, lying on the counter, swiftly clenched.

"You know I wouldn't trust any woman farther than I could throw her by the scruff of the neck!"

Buck Henifer glanced apprehensively toward the post office partition, but all was quiet.

"Well, mebbe you were handed a dirty deal. But Ophelia's a mighty nice girl."

"They're all alike. Every woman alive is a born cheat and a born liar!"

Ophelia abruptly appeared, with blazing eyes and furiously pink cheeks.

Harper gave her a startled glance and turned very pale. The look he addressed to Buck was almost murderous.

"Why didn't you tell me some one was back there?"

"You knew very well I was back there all the time!" Ophelia stormed. "How dare you say that all women are cheats and liars?"

"I—I'm terribly sorry, Miss Bartrom," Harper stammered.

"You aren't sorry! You meant it! What do you know about women? What do you know about me? How dare you call me a cheat and a liar?"

"I didn't mean to imply—"

"But you said it. You meant it. You called me a cheat and a liar!"

"Oh, please—"

"I'm a cheat and a liar! You said so!"

Buck Henifer was frightened. He felt that he was the innocent cause of this dreadful situation.

"Look here," said Buck anxiously, "there ain't any reason why two nice young folks like you—"

Ophelia whirled on him.

"You keep out of this," she snapped.

"I'm a cheat and a liar. You heard this man say so."

She was struggling into the yellow slicker. Harper reached out to help her, but she sprang back and fairly flew to the door.

When she was gone, Ben Harper and Buck Henifer looked at each other dismally. Then Harper shrugged.

"I'm sorry," said Harper. "I didn't mean to be personal."

"You may know more about women than Brigham Young did," Buck warmly rejoined, "but from where I was standing it looked like the young lady had a right to be good and mad."

"What of it?" snapped the quarryman.

"Only that her cousin-by-marriage is a hot-tempered boy, once his feelings are really good and hurt. And the quickest way to strike sparks from him is to have a run in with any of his womenfolks. He is just as apt to come gunning for you as not."

Ben Harper looked skeptical.

"Who is he?"

"Will Boggs."

Harper leaned heavily on the counter. He had suddenly become so pale that Buck was alarmed.

"Hell! I've been dickering with Will Boggs for the last ten days for a twenty-

five-hundred-dollar loan to carry me over until the money from that contract for the Cypress Spoon Road begins coming in!"

Buck Henifer slowly wagged his head. "You certainly scorched your toast that time, kiddo. The best thing for you to do is to get that girl on your side quick."

"I don't do business that way," said Harper.

"You ain't forgetting, are you, that the spur from your pit to the siding here runs over her cousin Angelica's land?"

"She gave me that right of way—in writing."

"She could go to law, couldn't she, and take it away from you?"

"She might," Harper admitted.

"Looks to me," said the storekeeper cheerfully, "if you want to save what's left of your bacon, you've got to head off that girl before she sees Will Boggs. What's the matter with you, anyhow, Ben? She's the prettiest girl that ever came to Vingo. You're the only man here who hasn't fallen for the kid like a ton o' bricks. How do you get this way? Huh?"

Harper opened his mouth, but said nothing. He jammed on the black sombrero and strode out of the commissary, mounted his mule and started rapidly down the road.

Will Boggs came over to the commissary a little later that afternoon, and if proof was needed that Benjamin Kalo Harper would do well to swallow his pride and make his peace with Ophelia, Will furnished it.

Before the sensational success of his wife and himself in Florida real estate speculation, Will Boggs had been a dynamite man in the quarry that Harper now owned. Dynamite men are, by the very nature of their occupation, slow to arouse. They cannot be hurried, but, given sufficient provocation and a little time, they can become quite as angry as men who do not follow explosive callings.

The half mile walk from the house had given Will ample time to become emotionally interesting. He stalked into the commissary with wrathful eyes.

"Where is that fellow?" he burst out.

"You mean Ben Harper?"

"I don't mean anybody else but!"

"Aw, he left for the quarry a long time ago. And he shot a snake on the ground close to Ophelia's feet—you heard?"

Will Boggs inserted an expensive cigar in his mouth, but did not light it. He chewed upon it vigorously.

"What did he do to Ophelia?" he ground out. "I killed two snakes this morning with a club—and I'm not bragging about it, either!"

"Do?" Buck echoed. "Why, they just had a talk."

"That poor little thing came home crying as if her heart would break," her cousin's husband announced. "But she wouldn't give me the details. She locked herself in her room, and she's been in there ever since. I want to know what that skunk said to her."

"Well," said Buck, uneasily, "it seems that Harper hasn't much use for women."

"Does that give him the right to go round insulting them?"

"Look here, Bill," Buck soothed, "I don't think Harper was aimin' to hurt Ophelia's feelin's. She's a sensitive kid, and she took his joshin' seriously. I heard every word. The fact is, she made a big hit with Harper. You know how it goes, Will. The higher they ride, the harder they fall."

"Well," Will declared, "any man who makes my little cousin cry is no friend of mine. It's a mighty funny way to show you like a girl—to make her cry."

And Will Boggs, indignantly chewing the cold cigar, stalked out of the commissary. That evening, when the local freight came in, Harper and Boggs met on the station platform. There was very little said.

After the local freight had pulled out, and Harper had finished checking off some new crusher parts that had been unloaded, he dropped in at Buck Henifer's house.

"Boggs turned me down," he announced. "Yesterday he told me I could have that twenty-five hundred whenever I wanted to reach out my hand and take it. To-night he had nothing to say but no. It's that girl."

"But you're goin' to be a little more genteel to her from now on, ain't you, Ben?" Buck asked hopefully.

"I'm going to Majolica in the morning and borrow the money at the Citrus Growers," he answered. "I hate to deal with banks; much rather do business with an individual. Well, so long."

"So long," said Buck dolefully.

III

THE rain stopped that night, and the morning was clear, with a lively blue sky and a warm friendly sun. It was difficult

for a young and healthy man to be depressed under these circumstances, and when Ben Harper reached the Citrus Growers Bank in Majolica his optimism and confidence had returned.

He needed both. To be sure, Fred Mason, according to all accounts, was a warm-hearted, sympathetic fellow; but it paid to go into a bank radiating good cheer when you wanted to borrow money.

He was assailed momentarily by doubt when he saw Will Boggs handing in some checks at the receiving teller's window, and as he turned toward the marble counter behind which sat Fred Mason, the cashier, he encountered a puzzling glance from a pair of large and beautiful blue eyes. Ophelia, wearing a fresh blue summery dress and golden silk stockings, with her curly blond hair tumbled about her face by the breezy drive into Majolica, was a glimpse of sheer loveliness.

Harper went over to her with his black sombrero in his hand.

"I want to apologize for the things I said yesterday," he announced. "I don't know you, and I'm sorry that any of it could have been taken personally."

Ophelia said nothing. She looked up at him with a curious smile, as if waiting for him to say more. Harper bowed, smiled grimly, and went on behind the marble counter. A moment later he had forgotten her existence. Not until he had left the bank did he remember her standing there, smiling and regarding him with a question in her eyes.

Fred Mason's welcome was not warm; still, Fred Mason was not the effusive kind.

"I'm not as well acquainted with you as I'd like to be," Harper said, as he tossed his sombrero on a near-by table. "I wanted to drop in and give you some idea of what I'm doing out our way. I think I've got the best road-building rock that can be found anywhere in Florida. I've landed one contract, and others are coming along. It makes me dizzy to think of the roads this section alone is going to need when all these new real estate developments get under way."

Fred Mason's mind seemed to be elsewhere at the moment.

"I heard," he said, when he perceived that something was expected of him, "that you've been having a pretty hard time of it."

"Not hard," said Harper; "just interesting. It's going to take a little time, of course. I suppose you've heard of that big contract I landed for supplying the rock for the Cypress Spoon Road?"

"I heard you were having a lot of trouble."

Harper had grown a little pale about the mouth. "The rain has held me up, but I'll be running full blast by to-morrow. That quarry will be a regular little gold mine if I can only keep the wheels turning. I—I wonder if you'll take a lien on my crusher. I'm going to need about five thousand dollars to meet pay rolls until the money from the Cypress Spoon job begins coming in."

"But you already have one lien on that crusher," Mason said, "as well as two mortgages and a lien on your land. You're a depositor here, and naturally I've been checking you up. I'm afraid, Mr. Harper, that your collateral isn't sufficient. We're anxious to help our customers in every way, but we must protect our stockholders."

Harper was beginning to perspire.

"Mr. Mason," he exclaimed, "certainly I'm entitled to some consideration as a—what do you call it?—a moral risk! I look on myself as one of the coming men of this section."

"I have no doubt that you are," said Fred Mason, "but the truth of the matter is that at the present time our loaning capacity has been stretched just about to the limit."

"But five thousand dollars—" Harper began desperately.

"Would stretch it beyond the limit."

"I might manage to squeeze through on a little less—say twenty-five hundred."

"But your collateral—"

"I'm not talking collateral; I'm talking moral risk. Am I a good risk or a bad risk?"

"I'm afraid," said Fred, "that we can't help you out to-day. I'll take it up with the loan board at the next meeting, but I can't act without consulting them. Mr. Conner is in Jacksonville. You might run in, say, in a week or ten days."

And Ben Harper presently found himself walking down River Street, in the brilliant sunlight, in a slightly befuddled condition. There remained no one now to whom he could turn. He carried his only account at the Citrus Growers; he was not known at the Majolica National.

This was Thursday. If he could not meet the pay roll by noon Saturday—Colored laborers, you see, are queer about pay day. They seem to think that money comes to their white employers from some magical source, and they get suspicious and sulk and lay off when not paid promptly. Harper was paying off on alternate Saturdays, and the approaching Saturday was pay day. What, he desperately asked himself, was he going to do?

He returned to Vingo that afternoon while Buck Henifer was sorting out the mail, and slumped down in a chair in the post office.

"Well," he announced wearily, "that girl is certainly making me pay for the things I said yesterday. The bank turned me down."

"Go on!" Buck gasped.

"Fred Mason was colder than the eye of a dead sardine. He was shaking his head before I could open my mouth. Somebody had been priming him. Oh, of course that girl's cousin had nothing to do with it!"

"You don't think Will Boggs was low enough to tell him to turn you down!" Buck protested.

"He was there just ahead of me," said Harper, "and Mason was all set for me. Gosh, Buck, it's a funny situation!" And he began to laugh in a way that sent chills up Buck's spine. "Don't you think it's funny, Buck? All I ask is to be let alone, and—and a girl who means less than nothing to me—won't be satisfied till she makes a bum out of me! Gee, but it's funny!"

"Listen, kiddo," said Buck gruffly, "what you need is a good stiff hooker."

"No," he came back; "what I need is enough sense to keep my mouth shut when a woman is around."

"You better have supper with me," said Buck. "I ain't much of a hand in a case like this, but we'll shake up some cock-tails, and I'll get out that last bottle of Johnny Walker. I feel like getting fried myself to-night. If I had a dollar, Ben, you could have it. But just look at this. Read it and weep!"

It was a letter from a wholesale grocery house in Jacksonville, stating that if a remittance was not promptly forthcoming his last bill of goods would not be shipped.

"Save that bottle of Johnny Walker until pay day," said Harper. "We'll hold a wake over the remains of the Harper Coquina Rock Company. I'm going to run

along now and watch it pluck at the coverlet for awhile."

Buck was alarmed at the way the young man looked. There was an unnatural brightness in his eyes. Buck didn't know Ben very well then, but any one could see that he was desperate. This was his last stand—and his last stand, in spite of the game fight he had been putting up, was bound to fail.

Perhaps three-quarters of an hour after Harper had left on his saddle mule, Ophelia rolled up beside the commissary in the smart little gray roadster that Angelica and Will had given her on her first day in Vingo.

She was radiant with excitement.

"Buck," she burst out, "who do you suppose I ran into in Majolica this morning?" Her smile faded. "Has he been here already?"

"Yes," said Buck, "and he told me all about it. What I'm curious to know is, when are you and Will goin' to take his right of way out from under him?"

Ophelia was staring at him. "What are you talking about? And why are you acting so—funny?"

Buck looked up at her, scowling, and saw nothing in her face but bewilderment.

"Look here, Ophelia," he said, "are you tryin' to tell me you don't know that Will went into town on purpose this mornin' and fixed it at the bank so's Ben Harper couldn't borrow money?"

Her eyes widened. "Why, Buck, that's perfectly ridiculous. Will went into town because I wanted his signature on some papers. I've been buying up some real estate options, and I sold one this morning for a thousand dollars. We were in the bank making deposits when Harper came in. We weren't in there five minutes. Will didn't—"

"He was in there long enough to put a bee in Fred Mason's ear."

"Buck, he didn't even say good morning to Fred Mason."

"Well," said Buck, with a baffled air, "you can't say Will didn't turn Harper down last night for a loan he'd agreed to let him have."

"What?" gasped Ophelia. "Did Will do that?"

"He was goin' to loan Ben enough to carry him along till the money from his Cypress Spoon job commenced comin' in. And when you went home in a huff yesterday and allowed Harper'd insulted you,

Will got sore and wouldn't lend him a dime."

"Oh, no!" Ophelia wailed. "I hadn't any idea! Oh, the poor fellow! What—what will he do?"

"Close down the plant," said Buck grimly, "and lose the forfeit bond he put up on the Cypress Spoon contract."

"And—lose the quarry?"

"Sure—everything."

"Just because I— Listen, Buck, I'm going to find some way to help him out, but I wish you'd tell me what's the matter with him. Everybody likes him, and everybody's anxious to help him, but he's so—well, aloof. He acts as if he has a grudge against all mankind."

"He has a grudge against all mankind," Buck agreed, "and especially against all womankind, and nothin' will cure him except bein' taught that he's wrong—that there are some decent, honest women in the world. He's young, Ophelia, and he was hurt pretty bad. He took a shine to me because I'm just a harmless old swamp rat, and I reminded him of his old man."

Henifer frowned with pride at that thought, and went on:

"Nobody around here knows how that boy has suffered. I don't blame him at all for wantin' to keep to himself. And on top of that, this quarry is lickin' him. He's put up a long, hard, game fight. God knows, I wish I could do somethin' for him."

"It was some woman," said Ophelia. "Tell me about her, Buck. Who was she? What happened?"

"Ophelia, it was sort of given to me in confidence."

"I'm not going to betray it," Ophelia promised. "I want to help him. I'm going to help him, but I must have something to work with. Was he awfully in love with her?"

"It was his mother," said Buck.

"Oh, Buck!"

"He didn't come right out and tell about it," Buck explained, "but I could read pretty well between the lines. Even with the way that woman treated him, he's still got this queer, old-fashioned idea about bein' courteous to women." Henifer paused.

"Yes, Buck?" Ophelia prompted.

"Well, she must have been pretty selfish. She never let the boy own his own soul. They lived up in Ohio, you know. Ben's old man run a limestone quarry up there. And when the time came for Ben

to go away to college, she wouldn't let him go. Wanted him right by her. Then a fine chance came for him to go to Central America to run a big marble quarry. Well, she wouldn't listen to it. And Ben gave in every time. Thought it was his duty to devote his life to her."

"His own mother!" Ophelia half breathed.

"Things went on like that for years; she demandin' everything, and Ben always givin' in to her. And his old man was the same way—givin' up everything because she demanded it. She was always havin' hysterics when either of them rubbed her the least bit the wrong way."

"A selfish creature!" the girl declared.

"About a year ago it all came out that she'd been lyin' to 'em and deceivin' 'em for years. Even with the way she treated him, up to then Ben thought she was the finest, purest woman in the world. And one night he and the old man came home from the quarry, and she was gone. The old man put a bullet in his heart a few days later."

"Oh!" Ophelia gasped.

"It had been goin' on for a good many years. Ben never paid much attention to the man. He thought the fellow was nothin' but a shrimp. At first Ben wanted to follow them and kill them both, but he got over that. He used to lay awake nights thinkin' of meetin' up with them; what he'd say to her for killin' his father and practically ruinin' both their lives. He don't want to meet her again. He don't want to meet any woman again. You see, Ophelia, he's got a pretty good right to mistrust women."

"He has!" Ophelia agreed vehemently. "And I'm going down and talk to him. He doesn't look well, and—gee, Buck, I could just about cry. Well, I'm a pretty good business woman, and I'm going down there and see what I can do!"

IV

BEN HARPER was in the little pine shack that served him for office and living quarters, checking over his rock tallies, and somehow so blind inside that he could never make a column of figures add up the same, when the Georgia boy came in. Tom Aycock was the engineer of the little locomotive that hauled gondolas full of crushed rock to the main line siding, and empty gondolas back.

Smearred from waist to heels with mud, he had trudged in a half mile to report that the engine and one gondola were up to their journals in that patch of low land near the drainage ditch bridge. The long rains had softened the ground; the track wasn't ballasted heavily enough, it had settled, and if something wasn't done about it pretty quick, by morning the engine and that gondola would be out of sight. All four of the locomotive's drivers were off the rails.

Harper sat and looked at the soft-voiced Georgia boy in silence for a full minute. He had several impulses. One was to jump up and kick out the sides of the shack; another was to smash the table and filing cabinets, and to crush the adding machine with the iron casting lying at his feet. By these tokens he knew that the strain of months was telling; that his nerves were giving way.

A one-horse quarry, such as Harper owned, is no stronger than its weakest link. If the pits are flooded, the crusher receives no rock—and the plant closes down. If the crusher breaks down, the gondolas receive no rock—and the plant closes down. If delivery of rock over the spur to the main line of the railroad is interrupted in any way—the plant closes down.

His contract with the Cypress Spoon road builder called for five cars of crushed rock each day. The rainy weather had caused him to be late several days in deliveries; a breakdown on the crusher had put him further in arrears; and this wreck on the spur would complete the disaster.

It would take until Saturday to hoist the locomotive and steel gondola out of the mud and to ballast the track sufficiently to restore it to usefulness. That meant a large gang at work all night for two nights, and night work meant time and a half for overtime. And Saturday was pay day.

Lightnin', a tall, blue-eyed negro, drifted into the shack with a broad grin.

"'Scuse me, boss man," said Lightnin', "but dez a lady down yonda on de road who says she wants t' see you as soon as you kin git round to it. Her cah is done bogged down in de sand, and she says, please, suh, will you help git her out?"

"Ah, yes," Ben Harper murmured, and placed one cold, moist, trembling hand firmly upon his forehead. "Go fetch a team of mules from the pit, Lightnin', and some chain. Fasten the chain to the front

axle of the car and haul it out. Tell the lady I'll be there directly."

"Yassuh!"

He fixed his sick brown eyes on the Georgia boy.

"Tom," he said, "load up the empty gondola with all the planks you can find. Ease it down the grade carefully to the wreck and spread out the planks so you'll get a wide purchase for your jacks. While you're jacking up the engine have a gang with shovels unloading the gondola. We'll use that rock for new ballast."

"Yes, Mr. Harper; but where'll I get the jacks?"

"What's the matter with those jacks out in the tool shed?"

"Why! They ain't near hefty enough, Mr. Harper. They're nothin' but house jacks. What we're goin' to need is regular railroad jacks. The nearest railroad jacks are in Majolica Junction, and they won't lend them jacks to anybody."

Ben didn't hear the end of that sentence. Some pulse in his head was banging away so noisily that nothing else was audible. He dropped his head on his arms. He knew he was licked. Fate had finally delivered the knockout.

He heard Tom's voice at his ear, but what the boy was saying didn't seem to make sense. He supposed he was dreaming when the voice of a girl wanted to know what was wrong.

V

OPHELIA looked at him, slumping there with his head on his arms, his hands stretched out in front of him, the fingers opening and clutching. She started toward him, then wheeled on the Georgia boy with a sharp question.

The engineer was frightened by Ben Harper's collapse. He began bewilderedly to explain. They couldn't do anything with that engine without regular railroad jacks, and there weren't any hydraulic jacks nearer than Majolica Junction, and the shop foreman there wouldn't lend them anyhow on account of the trouble he'd had getting them back from the Cypress Spoon Shingle Company, when their logging engine fell off the track into a ditch, and—

"Listen," said Ophelia, "you calm down, d'you hear me? You do what you can to get things started while I go to Majolica Junction for those jacks. How many do you need?"

"Two, ma'am," Tom said. "But how 're you goin' to tote them? They weigh five hundred pounds apiece."

"In my roadster."

"That roadster? Good-by roadster!"

"Well," said Ophelia, "it's my roadster. Now you get busy."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tom.

It was long after supper time when the little gray roadster dashed into Majolica Junction, where the railroad shops are. Ophelia eventually found the shop foreman playing pinochle with some friends. She pleaded with him for the better part of an hour, and finally won the jacks with an extravagant promise to return them before noon Saturday. They were loaded into the rear deck of the roadster.

The weighty black cylinders pressed the rear springs flat upon the axles, and the new position of the springs somehow made the breaks almost inoperable. It was fortunate that there happened to be very little traffic.

A gang was toiling at the wreck when Ophelia returned. Lanterns had been rigged up on palmetto bushes. Flambeaux, consisting of pop bottles of kerosene with pine-needle wicks, were standing about in the sand and mud. Men with shovels were tossing rock from the gondola; another crew was constructing a platform to hold the jacks.

Ben Harper was on the roof of the cab, directing operations. His face was white and drawn. Tears welled into Ophelia's eyes when she looked up and saw how haggard it was.

"Please don't come down," she begged, as he swung a leg over the side. But he climbed down and gave her a faint, courteous smile. She would never know how he resented her intrusion into his affairs.

"It was good of you to get those jacks," Ben Harper remarked.

"Oh, it was fun," said Ophelia, her heart pounding. She wanted to take his head into her arms and mother him. "Can I have a word with you—now that you're down?"

"Why, certainly."

She knew he didn't want to talk to her; but he smiled again, and Ophelia wanted to cry more than ever; it all seemed so tragic. "It's about that loan that my cousin would not let you have."

He seemed to stiffen all over, and Ophelia realized then how resentful he was of her interference.

"I'd prefer not to discuss that," said Ben.

"We've got to discuss it," Ophelia declared. "I can't let you go on thinking that I'd do such a thing. And you've simply got to let me—square things. I'm sure there's some way we can raise enough money for your pay roll before Saturday."

He was shaking his head in rapid little jerks. "No, no. You're very kind. I'll make out all right."

"What," said Ophelia, "will you do?"

He gave her a glimpse, through his eyes, of the seething resentment her persistence had stirred up. Then that wan, formal smile.

"Oh, I'll borrow it," he said casually.

"Where?"

He clicked his teeth. Ophelia seized his elbow.

"Mr. Harper, please don't be so—silly. You just can't go on this way. Do you think I'm being inquisitive—or—or playing a trick? Or do you just hate having me butting in after—after yesterday?"

"No," Ben Harper replied. "I'm grateful for—for your intentions, but I don't need help."

"See here," she said sternly, "will a thousand dollars meet that pay roll? You told Will it would. Mr. Harper, will you pay eight per cent if I can raise that money? Yes or no? Do you want to keep this quarry running, or don't you?"

"Yes," he said wearily, "I do."

Ophelia jumped up.

"You stay here," she said. "I'll be right back."

He watched her until the blue dress and the twinkling golden stockings were lost in the darkness, and he frowned. He was sure that no woman would go to all this trouble without some dishonest motive.

VI

THE shovel gang had finished unloading the gondola, and the rock lay in two long yellow mounds, like banks of new gold.

A little old man dressed in gray, except for his black derby and black shoes, came walking at a brisk pace down the track from the quarry and into the lantern light. He hastened to where Ben Harper was standing.

"Hello!" he said breezily. "Hello, hello!"

He had a square chin, and there was a hard light twinkling in his gray eyes.

"Who in hell are you?" said Ben.

This was more than a social error. Ben did not believe there was a man left in the world who could do him harm; but there was a man, and this was he.

The little old man in gray had suddenly stiffened.

"Me?" he barked. "Who in hell am I? Why, my name's Daggett. I am connected with the railroad. I chanced to be in Majolica Junction when some girl came to the shops and borrowed a pair of the company's jacks."

"That's right," Ben admitted. "And you can have them back over my dead body."

The little gray man stiffened a bit more at that.

"Say," he said, "you don't feel very companionable to-night, do you? I don't want the jacks, but I'm here to tell you that they aren't going to do you one mite of good."

"And I'm here to tell you," retorted the young man, "that I'll have that engine up on the rails and the rails lifted out of the mud and properly ballasted by Saturday morning."

"You may and you may not," was Mr. Daggett's response. "The point is, when you get out of the mud what are you going to haul?"

"Rock," said Ben. "Coquina rock, Mr. Daggett."

"What are you going to haul the rock in, Mr. Harper?"

At this point in the conversation Ophelia returned. Ben saw her standing a few feet behind Mr. Daggett, waiting for them to finish.

"In gondolas, of course!" Ben snapped.

"Whose gondolas?"

"Florida East Coast, naturally!"

"Not," said Mr. Daggett quietly, "if I know it. We can't afford to have our rolling stock run over such roadbeds as this. Nothing but luck saved that gondola from being smashed when your engine went down. No, sir; I can't let you have any more of our gondolas."

"What am I going to ship my rock in?"

"Don't know," said the railroad man; "don't care."

Ophelia smilingly approached.

"Aren't you the gentleman," she addressed Mr. Daggett, "I saw in the Majolica Junction railroad shops when I got the jacks?"

"I am," said Mr. Daggett.

"I hope," continued Ophelia, "that I didn't interrupt your conference with Mr. Harper."

"The conference was finished," Mr. Daggett assured her, "long before you interrupted me."

"It was wonderful of you," said Ophelia, "to come all this way to see how we are getting along. I suppose you've noticed we haven't wasted much time."

"You're pretty fast workers, all right," Mr. Daggett agreed, with a hard grin.

"Don't you think we'll have the engine back on the rails by noon to-morrow?"

"You may," said the railroad man, "if it doesn't fall off that platform."

"It mustn't," said Ophelia earnestly. "We've had so much bad luck lately, with the rain flooding the pits and the crusher breaking down, and we simply can't afford any more delays. You have no idea how much it means to us to make a go of this old quarry of ours."

Mr. Daggett looked uneasily from her to Ben Harper. The latter was gazing at Ophelia with an expression which the railroad man could have interpreted almost any way he pleased.

"Are you telling me," Mr. Daggett asked, "that you have money of your own invested in this quarry?"

"Every penny I can get my hands on," Ophelia affirmed. "And didn't I overhear you telling Mr. Harper that you won't let us have any more gondolas?"

"That's what I told him."

"Oh, but you couldn't be so cruel!"

"Couldn't I? You bet I could! No more gondolas!"

"That means," said Ophelia, her beautiful eyes full of reproach, "that you're driving us out of business."

"Listen," said Mr. Daggett gruffly; "I won't have you putting the blame on me. I've got to watch out for the interests of the railroad. That's what I'm hired for."

"But isn't it in the interest of the railroad to encourage every industry along its right of way?"

"No, ma'am; not when any industry is apt to smash up our rolling stock."

"But we haven't done a dollar's worth of damage to your rolling stock—and we won't." She smiled up at him. "I don't think you're the kind of man who would send a pair of hard working people into bankruptcy."

"Why did you make such a fool investment in the first place?" Mr. Daggett growled. "Why don't you ballast this road-bed properly?"

"We will," Ophelia promised.

"You fix up this soft spot, and before next month, when I'll be making another trip of inspection, you stiffen up the whole road-bed."

"We certainly will! And we can have gondolas?"

"Yes, you can have gondolas." He started away, then turned and looked at Harper with that hard grin of his. "It's a lucky thing for you," said Mr. Daggett, "that you've got this girl for a partner. Good night, miss."

"Good night," said Ophelia sweetly, and turned to Ben. "Here's the thousand," she announced.

VII

BEN HARPER smiled, then glanced at the check in Ophelia's hand, and wondered again what her game was. She was too beautiful to be honest, and her clever handling of the railroad man had given him a glimpse of infinite cunning.

"Aren't you relieved?"

"I don't know how I can ever thank you."

He could actually admire the sureness with which she was undermining his resistance. And when that check left her hand she would have purchased the right to dictate. The realization sent a fresh hot wave of resentment over him. He was helpless. This blue-eyed slip of a girl had him just where she wanted him.

Ophelia gave him her most disarming smile. "Aren't you glad I dropped in this afternoon to talk things over?"

"I certainly am!"

They had seated themselves on a box of crowbars, and she was so close to him he could have touched her side by moving an elbow. And the fragrance of the perfume she used disturbed and irritated him.

He stole a glance at her profile, and observed that her lashes were long and upward curving, that her nose was straight and delicately formed, and that her chin was resolute. She was, he realized, a beautiful girl. What was her game?

She turned her head quickly and smiled, her face alarmingly close.

"There's nothing I love better than a good fight," said Ophelia. "And I'm so

anxious to see you put this quarry on a paying basis. Things do look brighter now, don't they?"

"Yes," he agreed.

In the soft golden glare of lanterns and flambeaux, she appeared innocent and extremely young and guileless. Without her, his fight would have been lost hours ago. His realization that she had been doing most of the recent fighting brought another hot flush to his face.

"Look here," he said, "this check isn't signed by Will Boggs; it's signed by you."

"Yes," said Ophelia, looking him in the eye. "I made it in a real estate deal. I wasn't lying when I told that railroad man that I had invested every dollar I could lay my hands on. I have a little more tied up in options, and when I can get it out I want to invest that in the quarry, too. Options on real estate aren't safe, and I can't afford investments that aren't safe. I want my money where I can keep an eye on it all the time."

"This quarry," he protested, "is not a good investment. You can see how unsafe it is. Three different times since noon, I've been sure that the jig was up."

"But it's been pulled through."

"Yes, by you."

"Well," said Ophelia, "I'm willing to help every way I can."

He looked at her so intently that Ophelia, after a moment, dropped her eyes. For an instant, it seemed, he had come near making a discovery. It was hard to believe that she was not as honest and straightforward as she seemed. Then that lucid interval was past, leaving him as doubtful of her as before.

She was watching an ink-black negro who, with graceful, powerful swings of a sledge, was driving a block under one of the wheels of the tender.

Ben Harper had arisen from the crowbar box on which they were sitting. A man had climbed over the cowcatcher and was picking his way among planks and blocks toward them. Ophelia had seen him in the commissary a few times, but did not know who he was.

He was a short, heavily built man with a small tight mouth, blue jowls and bright black eyes under a square forehead. He was chewing gum, the muscles in his cheeks bulging each time he closed his jaws. This motion ceased when he approached Ben Harper.

"This," he said, "is sure a nice lookin' mess. It's what you get, though, for runnin' your rails over an old floating tussock."

"It never was a floating tussock," Ben said coldly. "It's solid land."

"Well, mebbe 'tis. You've sort of messed things up generally, though, haven't you?"

"Shove a wider plank under that pinch bar," Ben shouted at one of the negroes, "and try bending your back a little. It isn't going to break."

The negro and several others chuckled. They liked Harper.

"We might talk a little business tonight," the newcomer went on, "if you're in the mood."

"There's a price tag on everything I own," said Harper, "and you don't have to ask the price of this quarry twice."

"It's still where it was, huh?"

"Just."

"I don't think you're goin' to make a go of this quarry, Harper."

"A lot of people seem to think the same thing."

"You've bitten off a good deal more than you can chew. Why don't you take in a partner?"

"I will. I'll sell a half interest for twenty-five thousand dollars to anybody who has the cash."

"Don't be a fool, Harper." He looked at Ophelia, who had arisen, and ran his eyes slowly down her figure. After seeming to give the matter some consideration, he jerkily tipped his hat.

"Now, listen, Harper; I know as well as you do that you're up against a stone wall. You've been trying to run this plant on a shoestring, and you're through. I know you're broke."

"How do you know it?" Harper snapped.

"Everybody knows it. But I'm not going to take advantage of any man when he's down. That's not the way I do business. My offer stands."

"Your offer's out."

"I wouldn't be too hasty, Harper. You don't like me, and I know it. But you're a fool to let a petty dislike put you into the bread line. If you'll sell out for twelve thousand, I'll give you my check right now, and I'll assume all obligations. All I do is step in, and you step out clear of debt and with twelve thousand bucks in your jeans. What do you say?"

"The shortest way off my property," Ben answered, "is that path right over there. You'd better take it before I lose my patience."

And he turned his back. This maneuver brought him face to face with Ophelia, and he surprised in her eyes a look of sparkling satisfaction. The man was moving slowly away.

"Who is he?" Ophelia wanted to know.

"His name is Zorn," Ben told her.

"He's got a farm down on the river. He's been pestering me to sell out ever since I bought the quarry."

"I don't like his looks," Ophelia encouraged him. It was the first time Ben Harper had ever willingly told her anything. "He looks crooked to me."

"Well, he came down here a couple of years ago," Ben expanded. "Buck Henifer thinks he's hiding and wants to occupy himself with something that won't take him too far into the open. Buck looked him up, but didn't find anything. Zorn left no trail."

Ophelia glanced nervously at a near-by pine thicket. The invisible fronds of a palm tree rattled in the breeze from the ocean.

"Does he live near the quarry?"

"A half mile from the crusher. My land runs down to his property line."

"What does he do?"

"He makes a pretense of farming, but all I've ever seen under cultivation was a patch of cane and a half acre of yams."

"Is there rock under his land?"

"Yes, but it's mostly ojus, which is too soft for construction or road work."

"Maybe he's found gold on your land," Ophelia suggested; "or oil."

"Oil or gold isn't found in this kind of formation," said Ben. "No. If there were, he'd have come up on his price. He offered me twelve thousand six months ago, and he's stuck to it ever since."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Yes; but it's evidently all the layout's worth to him."

Tom, the Georgia engineer, was coming toward them, leaping from plank to plank. He carried a spanner in one hand, and the expression on his sweaty, dirt-streaked face was owlish.

"Mr. Harper," he said, anxiously, "you'd better kick that old Dan Vickus out of here. He ain't got brains enough to bell a buzzard. He says he's just seen a

ghost, and he's puttin' the fear o' Gawd into them niggers."

VIII

OPHELIA realized that the sounds of men at work were no longer issuing from the other side of the locomotive. She followed Ben Harper and the Georgia engineer, scrambling over a jackstraw tangle of ties to the cowcatcher, and reviewing her scanty knowledge of Vingo ghost lore as she went. Vingo, she had learned, somehow provided the most fertile of soils for ghosts and ghostly happenings.

It seemed so strange to her that the luxury belt—that narrow strip of sand running down the Florida coast, with its million-dollar hotels and shiny motors and wealthy Northerners—could lie only a few miles to the east of these swamps and jungles, with their poverty, their primitive ignorance—and their ghosts.

Every unoccupied house in Vingo had its ghost. There were "ha'nt lights"—queer balls of pale fire—which were supposed to float out of the windows of certain haunted houses.

Then there was the cruel old ghost who would occasionally horsewhip his five ghostly children. Negroes had assured Ophelia that the screams of these children had been heard coming from a swamp, and that a tie-cutting gang, hearing them late one afternoon, had dropped their axes and fled in terror.

But perhaps the most awesome ghost of all was that of Addison, the Yorkshireman. Addison had come to Florida some time in the seventeenth century, had settled on the north bank of the Majolica, and planted cotton, indigo, cane, and maize.

Addison was murdered by Seminole Indians. Soon after that unpleasant occurrence, Florida was swept by wars between the French, English, Spanish, and Indians. The grave of Addison was overgrown with weeds.

His ghost was a great white moth, measuring eight feet from wing tip to wing tip. He killed his victims by infolding them in these soft, powerful wings and smothering them.

Ophelia, in one evening devoted to listening to Vingo ghost stories, had learned to take ghosts seriously. She didn't believe in them, but she didn't laugh at them. The negroes had promised to notify her when the next "ha'nt light" appeared.

Surrounded by a gang of intensely interested black men, Dan Vickus was relating his scare to Ben Harper when Ophelia reached the group. Dan was one of the deacons of the colored church, and his utterances were listened to with respect. He was a compelling orator. And he now was genuinely frightened.

He had seen a ghost seven feet tall on Sandy Hill. Some time soon after supper he had loaded his rusty old single-barreled ten-bore and gone out gunning for 'possum. He had hunted along the river, skirted Addison's Landing, and started up toward the quarry by way of Sandy Hill.

At the crest of Sandy Hill he had sat down on a bench under a cabbage palm. He laid the shotgun on the bench beside him and inserted a pinch of snuff between his upper lip and gum. While he sat there, enjoying the snuff, the moon came up.

It was a full, yellow, misty moon, and there was a filmy white feather across it. There was mist under the moon, too—mist that lay low in the swamps like a veil.

He must have dozed. When he opened his eyes, there was a man standing before him in the moonlight—a tall, cadaverous man whose shoulders were stooped as if he were used to carrying burdens on his back.

His face was in shadow, but Dan Vickus sensed that it was full of evil. There was a queer odor coming from him. The deacon could not describe the odor, but it reminded him of the odor he had smelled in the holds of ships from far-away countries when he had worked as a stevedore in Jacksonville.

The tall man was looking down at Uncle Dan. He wore a flat black hat of queer shape, and his clothes were pale blue and fitted him like bags.

Until now, Uncle Dan had not suspected that the tall, queer-smelling man was other than flesh, blood, and bones.

"Evenin'," said Dan.

The man made no reply. Thinking that he might be a mute, Dan picked up the shotgun, so that there would be room for him to sit on the bench.

When he looked up again, the man was gone. Vanished! He hadn't made a sound; not a boot-squeak!

"He done dis'appeared right into de air," Vickus concluded.

"You've been drinking mule again," Harper said.

Several negroes laughed, but without

heart. They were willing to knock off work now.

"No, suh," the old darky insisted. "Ah done sawn dat ghost."

"On top of Sandy Hill?"

"Yes, suh!"

"Didn't he leave any tracks in the sand?"

"No, suh! Ghosts don't leave no tracks nowhere."

"Either you were dreaming, or you scared a live man away when you picked up that shotgun. Tom, give me your flash light. I'm going to look for that ghost. You men get back on the job. Dan, clear out of here, and don't let me catch you throwing any more ghost scares into my men."

"Do you mind if I go with you?" said Ophelia, in a small voice. "I'm terribly interested in ghosts."

He looked at her as if he had forgotten her presence.

"Are you?" he said. "All right then—come on."

The moon was riding high in thin clouds when they reached the crest of Sandy Hill, and the scene was well illuminated. Sandy Hill was not a hill at all, but a dune whose features were changed with every gale. A thin crust had formed on the sand after the recent rains, so that footprints showed plainly. Two sets of tracks met and crossed in front of the bench in an X of unknown dimensions.

"It wasn't a ghost," said Ophelia.

"They never are. I've hunted down every ghost that's been seen or heard since I came here."

Dan's footprints, short and wide, came up from the low land of the river to the bench. They were closely spaced, as if he had been trudging. In the direction of his get-away the spacing was at least four times as great.

"Let's follow the other tracks," said Ophelia.

They had been made, plainly, by a very large man, who had approached the bench from the direction of the quarry. He had made his departure over the eastern brow of the dune.

"When Dan Vickus picked up the shotgun to make room for him," said Ophelia, "he thought Dan was going to shoot him, so he kept on moving, as any sensible man would. It was probably some negro. Come on, Ben."

It was the first time she had called him anything but Mr. Harper, and she looked up at him quickly to see how he would react to it. He was walking beside her, not looking at the footprints, but out over the jungle that lay below them. Mist was rising in thin white drifts, to be scattered by the fresh warm breeze from the Atlantic. But in places where the wind did not penetrate it lay in milky pools. Ophelia shivered, although she was not cold.

"It wasn't a negro," he said. "A negro that tall would have splayed feet. These tracks are long and narrow."

Ophelia wondered what he was really thinking, and she wished he wouldn't be so formal and distant. Under these given romantic conditions, any man she had ever known would have tried to kiss her long before this. It was the kind of night when young men said things they did not really mean, and girls answered them in kind.

The blackness of the jungle awed her.

They followed the tracks to where they disappeared in the bunch grass of a hammock. Beyond the hammock, on a rise, a bright light was burning mysteriously.

"What light is that?" Ophelia wanted to know.

"It's Zorn's house."

"Oh," said Ophelia, "so that's where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Right on the river?"

"He could throw a stone from his porch into the river. There's no use following these tracks any farther."

"I suppose not," said Ophelia. Suddenly she bent over. She picked up from the sand a thin, pencil-shaped object about eight inches in length. It seemed to be hooked at one end, and at the other it tapered off almost to a point.

"Turn on your flash light, Ben!" she said excitedly.

IX

THE thing was brass. What had appeared to be a hook was in reality a tiny bowl.

"That's funny," said Ben. "It's a pipe. My father had a Chinese cook who smoked one of these things. He used to put a pinch of powdered tobacco into it and take about three puffs."

"Then," said Ophelia, "Dan Vickus's ghost must have been a Chinaman! But what would a Chinaman be doing here?"

They looked at each other.

"In these swamps!"

"In Vingo!"

"Let's see if we can find his tracks on the other side of this hammock," said Ophelia.

"All right, but you'd better take my arm. Those shoes you have on aren't very good for hiking."

"No," agreed Ophelia, and firmly took his arm. "It certainly is mysterious, isn't it?"

"It certainly is!"

She had made the pleasing discovery that his arm was like iron.

"I wonder what he thinks of me," Ophelia asked herself. "Does he hate me, or is he simply shy?"

They emerged from the hammock upon a broad patch of white sand. The footprints of the mysterious unknown went straight across and into a thicket. On the right, on a slight elevation, stood Zorn's house.

They penetrated the thicket. Beyond it was a lane which ran from Zorn's house to the road leading past the quarry to the Dixie Highway. With the aid of the flash light they found footprints crossing the lane into the hammock on the other side. Beyond the hammock, in a breeze-swept area of sand, they again found them.

"He must have circled Zorn's house and gone on down toward the river," said Ben, "but I don't know where he could have been heading. So far as I know, there isn't another house between here and the ocean. I've never been down here before. And I don't see much sense in going any farther."

She squeezed his arm. "Oh, let's see where they go! I think this is thrilling."

"Well—" He hesitated. "All right."

"How far is it to the ocean?"

"About two miles."

The branches of ancient water oaks met over their heads, and long beards of gray moss hung down almost within reach. The going became more difficult as they progressed. They were penetrating jungle now. Water oaks, palms, and slash pines grew so thickly that they could see no farther than a dozen steps ahead, and the ground they were traversing was soft and juicy.

They came abruptly to a path which ran off at right angles to the course they had been taking.

"Where does it go?" Ophelia wanted to know.

Ben was turning the flash light first in one direction, then in the other.

"I didn't know it existed," he answered.

"That's queer. It certainly is being used."

"Yes, it's packed hard. It may be part of the old King's Highway, but it seems to run east and west."

"To the ocean?"

"That way—yes."

"Oh, let's follow it to the ocean!"

"It's getting pretty late."

"I'm not afraid."

He hesitated. "Won't your cousin worry about you?"

"I told her I mightn't be home until midnight."

"All right," he agreed.

Ophelia twisted her shoulders and tried to see his face; but a blanket of clouds had drawn over the moon, and his head was nothing but a blur.

"Look here," said she impatiently, "are you doing this simply because I'm asking you to?"

"Of course not."

"You really want to go?"

"Yes," he answered.

She wanted to ask him if he really hated her, but that would have been going a little too far. She wanted to cry, and she wanted him to soften and become—well, human. Some day she might tell him how he had hurt her pride. No man had hurt her pride as he had. And that was strange, because, from their very first meeting, he had been unfailingly courteous.

They walked in silence under the arching branches, he flashing on the light at intervals. The path was not straight. It curved like a snake's trail.

"I'm afraid," said the girl presently, "that we've lost him. He might be hiding behind any of these trees—looking at us."

"He might," agreed Ben. "What would you do if he jumped out from behind a tree?"

"I'd scream. What would you do?"

"I'd probably scream, too."

Suddenly she clutched his arm. A pair of fiery red eyes peered down at her from an overhanging branch.

"Raccoon," he explained.

"Are there any snakes in here?" she gasped.

"It's a little too cool. They crawl away into their holes at sundown—on a night like this."

On a night like this! She wondered if he had ever been in love. Probably. Often. Had some woman disillusioned him, broken his heart? Ophelia wondered what she had been like. She tried to picture Ben Harper making ardent love to certain fascinating creatures of her imagination; but she could only see him, standing with arms folded, looking at them coolly.

They crossed the Dixie Highway and re-entered the jungle.

The mumbling and whispering of the surf had changed gradually to a muffled booming. The ground seemed to tremble under their feet. They emerged from the jungle into a thicket of palm trees with parched fronds which waved and rattled in the breeze. The damp black soil had given way to moist gray sand and suddenly to yielding white sand.

Footprints were no longer distinguishable. There were many of them, but the wind had filled them with sand until they were hardly more than faint, cup-like depressions.

The breeze had stiffened. It was fresh and steady and full of some alluring quality that resembled but was not a smell. It was the southeast trade wind, warm and balmy from the Gulf Stream. It was warmer here among the dunes than in the jungle, where the breeze did not penetrate.

A faint glow was spread over the scene. The palm trees reminded her of dancing witches; clumps of palmettos were crouching giants.

They had reached the final dune which shelved down to the hard-packed white shingle. Incredibly long, dark swells flashed white and foamed up on the beach, glowing for a moment, then vanishing.

Their rhythm was fascinating to Ophelia. She was conscious that her heart was beating rapidly. The loneliness of the empty stretch of sand and ocean invaded her. The eerie glow from the clouded moon was disturbing, too.

The clashing palm fronds and the dull throbbing of the ground under her feet made her want to run. A wild desire to race down the shelving dune to the hard sand and on into the warm tossing water obsessed her.

No; she wanted him to stop being so courteous and distant and to seize her roughly in his arms. She wanted to be kissed and loved. She would not have resisted him. She would have smothered him

with kisses. And she was suddenly weak and afraid—and angry and resentful.

"There's a ship," he said.

She wasn't interested in the ship, but she looked, and became aware that she was gripping his arm fiercely.

"Oh," she half whispered.

Far off, she saw the lights, very faint. It might have been the Flying Dutchman.

"It could be from the Caribbean—Cuba—Central America," she said romantically, "and it's probably loaded with copra or mahogany or pineapples."

"It's southbound," he said. "If it were from the West Indies it would be farther out, in the Gulf Stream. It's probably a New York boat bound for Miami with a load of tourists who each expect to make a million dollars in real estate before spring. I don't see our Chinaman, do you? Don't you think we'd better be starting back?"

"I suppose so," Ophelia agreed without enthusiasm. She was sure that a note of roughness had come into his voice; at least it sounded a little strange and tense, and she wondered if he, too, had fallen under the spell of this wildness and loneliness. "How dark it is!"

"Yes," Ben replied, and she was sure that that note was there again.

Since they had been standing on the dune, a black cloud had slid over the moon, and the trees and scrub palmettos had vanished. Even the sand was invisible. But the breaking waves were brighter; they seemed to glow, as if charged with phosphorus.

"It feels like rain," Ben announced presently. "I must be getting back on the job."

"And I must be getting home," said Ophelia.

They started back, and Ophelia was visited by the feeling that somehow something had happened between them. Things were not the same, but she found it impossible to explain why. He had done nothing, said nothing, to justify her in supposing that anything had happened, for he had been coolly unresponsive to the hot mood that had seized her.

Then it occurred to her that his mind had been on the quarry and his problems all the time. That magical moment on the dunes had not existed for him. Where she had seen romance, he had seen rock pits flooded by the rains; gondolas waiting empty for their yellow loads and eating up his profits with demurrage; men, white and

black, clamoring for money. Perhaps he wouldn't have been so unresponsive if he hadn't been so worried.

She said, abruptly: "Why don't you incorporate, Ben—raise enough money by selling stock to carry you through?"

"Try to raise it!" he came back so promptly that Ophelia knew her guess was correct.

"How much do you need?" She was prepared to have him turn back that question with his usual courteous, noncommittal answer, but his response was really eager.

"I own enough rock to keep a plant five times the size of mine busy for fifty years. That's a pretty conservative figure. I want to build roads and houses with it, but most of all I want to build roads—good roads. Roads have always appealed to me. You don't hear much about roads, and perhaps you don't realize how they're going down all over the country. Good roads that'll last. I don't think many people realize that the biggest industry in America is road building—bigger than steel. And coquina rock will build good roads for this climate. It's self binding, and it works equally well as a base for macadam or in a concrete mixture."

"It's a shame," said Ophelia, "that you can't sell that idea to somebody with lots of money. How much do you need?"

"Twenty-five thousand," he replied promptly. "With that amount in the bank I could borrow another twenty-five on the strength of it. I could go after contracts all over the State, and hire an experienced quarryman to run things while I was digging up business. I could junk this wheezy old plant, and put in a rotary crusher and a battery of up-to-date screens."

"Perhaps Zorn has the same thing in mind."

"Perhaps he has. He's been after me to sell ever since I bought Saunders out. When Saunders put up the plant for sale, Zorn was away on some trip. He and Saunders had had some trouble, and while Zorn was away Saunders decided suddenly to sell. And when Zorn came back I was in possession."

"And he immediately tried to buy you out?"

"Yes."

"But you won't sell to him, will you?"

"Not unless I'm forced to."

"Promise me you won't sell without telling me first. I have loads of ideas, Ben.

I don't think you realize what a smart girl I am."

She heard him draw a sharp breath, and she realized that she had carried things too far again.

"You've been very kind," he said, falling into his old manner.

"As soon as I can sell those real estate options," Ophelia declared, hurriedly, "I—I'd like to buy a part interest. I may be able to raise as much as five or six thousand. It isn't as much as you need, but it would help, wouldn't it?"

"The risk is too great," he answered, and his voice seemed to come from high above her. "I wouldn't let you put any money into that quarry."

"If I were a man, would you?"

"I don't know. You're not a man."

"Don't you think you're terribly stubborn, Ben?"

He hesitated before replying. "About some things," he said.

Was he, Ophelia wondered, thinking of his quarry? Wasn't he aware of her except as an intruder? Had he been conscious, for those few minutes above the ocean, of her and of the possibilities those few minutes had held? She found herself growing angry.

"What's the matter?" Ophelia demanded sharply.

He had paused.

X

"This isn't the path," said Ben, and steadied the beam of the flash light. It was reflected upward by black still water.

"Swamp!" said Ophelia.

"We must have taken the wrong path, or the wrong fork. These jungles are a network of paths and lanes. I think we'd better backtrack to the Dixie Highway and get our bearings."

"I think," Ophelia disagreed, "we'd save time by cutting through this hammock. The right path must be just over there. That's north, isn't it?"

"I'd say it's west."

"I'm pretty sure it's north. I've always had a good sense of direction."

"The safest—" he began, but Ophelia cut him off.

"Let's try my theory first. We can backtrack if I'm not right."

Ben Harper said nothing, but permitted her to lead the way down a sort of lane that entered the hammock. The hard high

ground of the hammock soon gave way to the moist black earth of jungle.

They came to a narrow, unused path. It was green with mold. On one side was a black ditch half full of water, on the other a swamp. Branches hung down so low that they had to stoop constantly.

"Where does this ditch go?" Ophelia wanted to know. She was rapidly losing faith in her theory.

"It's probably one of the ditches of the old development company. It should join the main ditch near Vingo."

The path grew narrower. The walls of the ditch, softened by many rains, had crumbled in. Parts of the path were under water.

It ended in a point, a tiny peninsula that jutted into the black, mirrorlike water of a swamp. No hard land was visible in any direction.

"I'm sure," said Ophelia, "that the path is just over there if we could get across."

"Perhaps we had better go back to that hammock," Ben suggested.

Ophelia tried not to feel alarmed, but the path, the swamp, even the trees with their dismally drooping moss, had suddenly taken on a queer aspect. She was really frightened. She had heard of men being lost in these swamps for days.

"Can't we get through this swamp?" she inquired.

"No," he said. "It's too soft."

"Is it quicksand?"

"It would act like quicksand. Keep to the path."

Ophelia hurried. When she could, she ran. Presently she said: "It seems much longer. I've lost all sense of direction. Is the ocean over there?"

"I heard it a moment ago. It's over there." And he waved the flash light in the opposite direction.

There was a sound of splashing behind a wall of creepers a few feet away. It continued; but when Ben flashed the light it ceased.

"Alligator?" Ophelia whispered.

"More likely a 'coon or a 'possum."

"But there are alligators in here!"

"They don't come out at night, though."

"Well—let's hurry!"

They scuttled under a mass of overhanging branches. Ophelia stopped on the other side.

"Throw the light over there," she requested. He did. "That cypress swamp

wasn't there before!" she exclaimed. "I'm absolutely sure it wasn't!"

"So am I!"

"We're off the track again!"

"I'm afraid so."

"Where do you think that hammock is?"

"Just over there."

What a relief it was to be sure! She could almost see the high, dry land of the hammock across the expanse of swamp.

In her eagerness, she stepped from the path and sank to her knees in mud that was black jelly.

Ben Harper leaped to the snake-like root of a tree and caught her hands. He pulled her up beside him. She clutched at his lapels, almost sobbing.

"You mustn't lose your head," said Ben.

"I'm not losing my head! Why! There isn't any bottom. What a horrible place! Oh, can't we get out of here?"

"Go slowly. You must keep to the roots. We'll get out all right."

"But people do get lost for days in these swamps!"

"We won't. We'll be all right as soon as we find that hammock."

"You're sure it's just over there?"

"Go ahead," he said. "I'll light the way."

She clung to the trunk of the tree for a moment, then ventured out on a root, balancing herself. To lose her balance or to slip meant falling into the mud. She jumped to a root of the next tree and he followed.

The branches and vines hung lower and lower as they proceeded. It was necessary to bend over all of the time. Her back commenced to ache.

Suddenly they came to the edge of the swamp. Rather, the swamp suddenly changed character. Ahead of them as far as the beam of the flash light would reach, was tall, gray marsh grass.

"It's the river!" Ophelia groaned.

"We're both wrong."

"Yes," he agreed after an interval of silence.

"We—we're lost. Oh, Ben, why didn't you make me go back?"

"I wasn't so sure myself. I'm afraid I hadn't been paying much attention."

"I shouldn't have made you go over to the ocean. It's all my fault. Oh, gee, Ben!"

"It's all right. Stop worrying. We'll get out of here all right. Let me try to fig-

ure out where we are. This damned river bends so. You're shivering."

"I'm not cold—just a little bit scared." But before she could protest, he had removed his coat and placed it around her shoulders.

"I won't go back through this swamp," Ophelia declared.

"We'll keep to the edge," said Ben. "There ought to be dry land a little farther down."

"Near the bridge?"

"Yes."

"I've seen alligators in those pools near the bridge."

"But they won't bother us."

They started again, Ben following. Ophelia's feet were wet and cold, and she felt miserable. She was sure that he was furious. He had been anxious to return to the wrecked locomotive, and she had selfishly taken him away. Everything she did seemed to be wrong. Tears of self-pity smarted in her eyes. She wished he wasn't so polite. She wished he would give her the devil.

"You're just boiling, aren't you?" she said.

"Nope," came his answer. "But I could kick myself for getting you into this. You said I was stubborn. That's why I gave in. I should have kept on being stubborn."

"You are sore at me!"

"Not a bit. I'm entirely to blame."

They stopped. A tremor in the air or in the ground had come down the broad valley. It changed to a throbbing, then to a rumbling that rapidly came nearer. In the distance occurred a series of measured shrieks.

They stared out over the swamp grass. The locomotive's headlight glared in their eyes, then swung away. They could see red sparks vomiting from the stack.

The valley was trembling. The train went past, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Only the vestibules were lighted; the rest of each car was dark.

"It's one of the de luxe trains from New York to Palm Beach and Miami," said Ben.

"And people are sleeping between clean white sheets," said Ophelia in an awed voice, "while we stand here in mud up to our knees—lost! Isn't there any way we can reach those tracks, Ben? We could swim the river!"

"Alligators," said Ben. "Come on."

"What time is it?"

"My watch stopped at four ten."

"Oh, Lord!"

XI

IN a hollow of the next bend in the valley they found dry land. It was a low hammock; a sort of island about fifty feet in diameter, with black swamp on one side and river marsh on the other. A clump of tall cabbage palms grew in the center of it.

Ophelia sank down on the trunk of a fallen tree. She was tired and wet and cold. He sat down beside her and lighted a cigarette.

"Can I have one, too?"

"I beg your pardon!" He produced the package and held the light for her. His hand trembled.

"Are you tired, Ben?"

"Pretty tired," he admitted.

"I'm absolutely all in," she confessed.

"What are we going to do?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to wait for daylight." He jumped up, and she heard him fumbling at the base of the nearest palm tree. Then a match glared in his hand, and he applied the flame to the brown lace fringing the dried frond stems, which braided the trunk in a fibrous sheath.

The dried stems burned fiercely, and the fire crept up the trunk. Soon the tree was a pillar of orange fire shooting up red sparks, the green fronds crackling and wilting.

He set fire to another palm, and a third.

Ophelia stood and looked about her. The brilliant yellow light penetrated only a short distance into the swamp, but the marsh grass, agitated by the sea breeze, seemed to roll in golden waves. Ophelia backed away from the heat.

"There's the bridge!" he exclaimed suddenly.

She could see it, dimly red, at the end of the valley.

"These trees will light the way," he said; "or would you rather wait until daylight?"

"Don't you suppose," said Ophelia, "that somebody may be attracted by the fire and come to show us the right way out?"

"If any one sees the blaze at this time of night," he answered, "he'll think it's some negro burning out a 'coon or a 'possum. Perhaps you'd better rest a while longer."

"I'll go," said Ophelia bravely.

A strip of cold gray light was gleaming along the eastern horizon.

It was day when they reached the long corduroy fill leading to the little bridge over the Majolica. The dawn wind was freshening. Dew glistened on palm fronds.

"If you'll wait here," Ben suggested, "I'll walk around to the quarry, get your car, and drive you home."

"No, I'll walk. I've got my second wind. It'll dry me out to walk."

The sun had risen well above the pine hammocks when they reached her car, standing where she had parked it when she had brought the jacks from Majolica Junction.

Ophelia climbed in, settled back in the driver's seat, and stretched out her legs with a sigh of exhaustion. Ben seated himself beside her.

"Just look at my shoes!" Ophelia gasped.

But he was looking at her face. Under numerous spots of mud, which had dried gray, it was white and drawn. Her dress was torn in a dozen places. One stocking had come down. But Ophelia didn't seem to mind. She was worn out. With half closed eyes she gazed dully through the wind shield.

A scarlet tanager flamed from a thicket, soared upward, vanished. Above the thicket the pale-blue smoke of a breakfast fire curled and was scattered by the wind. There was a fresh smell of pine in the air, and the sky was a miraculous soft blue.

"What a heavenly morning!" Ophelia sleepily murmured.

Ben Harper was regarding her with a faint, rather grim smile. "Don't you think we'd better be starting?"

Ophelia was drumming nervously on the steering wheel with her finger tips. "You won't have to go, Ben."

"I want to explain things to Will Boggs before he comes gunning for me."

Ophelia stopped drumming. "What can you tell him?"

"I'll tell him we're—engaged."

She looked at him sharply. "But you can't say that."

"I can—if you'll marry me."

She glanced quickly away from him, and deep color swept into her cheeks. He ran his arm along the back of the seat. Ophelia waited tensely, but the arm was not lowered. He did not move.

Tears came into her eyes, but she blinked them away. If he would only seize her in his arms, hug her, kiss her—tell her he really wanted her.

"Ophelia—will you marry me?"

She turned to him with eagerness. "Will it make you happy if I say yes?"

Ben gravely nodded. "Very," he said.

Ophelia felt herself trembling. She could not control it. Her knees were knocking together. She braced her feet against the floor board and gripped the wheel. Why didn't he kiss her? Why didn't he just go through the motions? She looked up at him finally with a wretched little smile. She was willing to take him under any terms.

"Shall we keep it a family secret until Angelica's party?"

"I'll go home with you now," he agreed, "and we'll break the news to Will."

"You get out of this car and go to bed," she said sternly. "You—you look like a ghost. I can handle Will. Run along, dear."

Ben climbed down and closed the door. Ophelia stepped on the starter. The engine throbbed, and the car moved slowly away. When she reached the bridge over the drainage ditch she turned and looked back.

He was still standing there, with the black sombrero tilted over his eyes, his feet apart, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his riding breeches.

XII

WHEN the roadster had dwindled among the pines, Ben shook himself, lighted a cigarette, and walked through the hammock to the scene of the wreck. His run of bad luck, he perceived, had been continuing in his absence.

Some time shortly after two o'clock the little locomotive had slipped off the jacks and scaffolding, gone over on its side, and embedded itself in the soft ground after the manner of a fallen meteor. No one seemed to be to blame, but if he had not been away from the job he was sure it would not have happened.

He should not have bought that locomotive, anyway; it was too heavy for fifty-pound rails, too heavy for the work. He had picked it up in a railroad yard in Atlanta, not because the price was low, but because it had looked like a real locomotive. It had a real cab, beehive stack. He had never owned a toy railroad as a

boy, and he had filled that old emptiness with this extravagance.

The Georgia engineer always referred to it as "the white elephant," but Ben loved it. Lying almost on its back in the mud, with its wheels grotesquely in the air, it still looked like a real locomotive, and some day he would lay seventy-pound rails for it.

The Georgia engineer was almost in tears. The men had knocked off and gone home; he could not drive them back to work.

Ben sent him to bed, and when the men reappeared by ones and twos, he set them to work rigging a derrick. If he drove the men, the locomotive might be back on the rails before Saturday night.

The pits were dry enough now for the men to go back into them, but he put every available man to work on the wreck and the roadbed.

He stayed on the scene until late in the afternoon, when Tom relieved him, then dragged himself off to the shack that he and the engineer occupied. He dropped on his cot with all his clothes on, and was asleep instantly.

He was sleeping so soundly at midnight, when Tom turned in, that the boy decided not to arouse him. He had left "Blue" Allen, a negro foreman of sorts, in charge of the job, and the work was going ahead smoothly.

There was another ghost scare that night—a serious one.

The moon, full and misty, climbed above the clouds at about one o'clock, and it was a misty, spooky night. All hands agreed on this—that it was a fine night for ha'nts to walk; and that was about all they did agree on.

According to some of the men, there were a half dozen ghosts, and according to others there were only two.

A silvery mist hung about the swamps and hammocks, and there was a damp, penetrating chill in the air.

Jack Preston, an old mulatto, was leaning on his shovel, resting. He was looking across a clearing toward a small pine hammock. Suddenly he yelled and pointed in the direction of the hammock with his shovel.

Something seemed to be dancing over there in the moonlight. It was tall—at least seven feet tall—and by the lightness of its movements one would guess that it weighed

little more than a feather. It danced out of the hammock a short distance, danced back, then out again.

The negroes soon agreed that that thing fluttering about in the moonlight was Addison's ghost—the ghost that smothered men by folding them in its horrible soft wings.

This creature had wings, white wings, and the body was black.

Presently some sixty odd negroes were clustered together, staring out over the moonlit clearing at Addison's ghost. It disappeared among the trees for a moment, but it came dancing out into the moonlight again; and the negroes clustered closer and closer together.

Then several of them saw a smaller object moving in and out among the trees. Another ghost!

Suddenly the great white moth stopped dancing, and started across the clearing toward the men. When it had gone halfway, it stopped and raised its wings and shook them.

From this juncture the accounts varied. Some of the negroes said that the great moth stood and shook its wings and stared at them from owlish eyes. Others claimed that the thing emitted a thin, shivery call, and that ha'nts hidden in the woods all about them answered the call.

But according to them all, no one there was sufficiently interested to linger and check up on the others. One ghost was more than enough. There was a thumping and ringing as sixty men laid shovels and picks and pinch bars aside and started toward the peace and security of home with a long, eager surge.

By morning they were too drunk to return to work. From the hour they returned until daylight the quarters were in an uproar with arguments and fighting and spirituals. Flambeaux were going, fish frying, 'possums baking—and "mule" being passed around in jugs.

Two old negroes, both deacons in the church, were the only men at work when Ophelia visited the wreck in mid morning. Mr. Harper, they said, was over in the hammock where the ghost had been seen.

She found him leaning against a pine tree, his sombrero tilted over his eyes, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. He was gazing at something in his hand, which he pocketed when she approached. He looked at her curiously.

"You have all the earmarks," Ophelia remarked breezily, "of *Sherlock Holmes* in one of his unhappiest moments. Have you found any ghostly evidence?"

He gave her a brief, hard smile.

"It was a woman," he said.

Her eyes widened. "A woman seven feet tall?"

"I don't know how it was done," said Ben; "but it was a woman."

Ophelia seemed incredulous.

"How do you know it was a woman?"

He examined the smoking tip of his cigarette and carefully flicked an ash away.

"Oh—tracks."

"Why," Ophelia demanded, "would a woman do such a thing?"

Ben shrugged. "She may have wanted to scare my men off the job."

"Who do you suppose it could have been?"

He shook his head.

"I don't think it could have been a woman," said Ophelia. "No woman could be so cruel. You're awfully suspicious of women, aren't you, Ben?"

Ben smiled. "Perhaps I'm wrong. But it worked out pretty well—if her object was to get me into a jam. I'm eight days behind on the Cypress Spoon job now. The slightest slip up—more rain, another breakdown—means I won't get a large enough check from them to meet my next pay roll. I could have begun delivering rock by Monday noon if that engine were on the track to-night."

"Will you lose that contract if you don't begin deliveries by then?"

"It isn't quite as bad as that. They've been held up by rain as much as I have, and they're getting this rock at such a low figure that they aren't apt to take advantage of a technicality. But it will give me a black eye with other contractors, the big ones. They don't like to deal with hard luck guys."

"You aren't a hard luck guy," said Ophelia, indignantly. "You're a game fighter, and I just hate to hear you talk this way. The only trouble with you is, you want to do all your fighting alone. You won't let anybody help you. Well, I'm going to help you. I'm going to begin by taking a big load off your mind."

She paused to draw a triumphant breath, and went on:

"I ran in to Majolica yesterday afternoon and made arrangements to sell four

of my options. It will take a few days, but by next Thursday or Friday at the latest, I'll have between four and five thousand dollars, and it will all be yours."

"I won't touch a cent of it," said Ben.

"You make me furious, Ben Harper! You know you need it, and I want you to have it."

"In the first place—" he began.

"We're engaged!" she flashed.

"That's one reason."

"Oh, gee whiz, Ben, don't be so stubborn. It's the reason you ought to take it. Doesn't being engaged make us partners?"

"It does not give me the right to use your money, Ophelia. If this quarry were an active, prosperous business, it might be different. It isn't even a good speculation. Even if it gets on its feet, the returns won't be large—for years. It may fail any day."

"Even with four or five thousand to nurse it along?"

"I will not take any more of your money, Ophelia."

"You mean you'll let the quarry close down rather than use my money?"

His pallor made his face look gaunt. He nodded.

Ophelia was on the verge of tears. "Don't you realize," she demanded in a choked voice, "that you're fighting nobody but yourself? Is it pride—or just because I'm a woman?"

"It's my own fight," Ben replied, "and if I can't win it single-handed, I won't lean on a woman."

"Is that why you resent my wanting to help you?"

"I don't resent it at all. I'm very grateful to you."

Ophelia gazed out over the clearing to where, perhaps an eighth of a mile away, the locomotive lay on its side, like a rhinoceros basking in the sun. Her shoulders rose and fell with a sigh. She looked up at him quickly.

Ben was examining the smoldering cigarette, his dark eyes screened by thick black lashes. His face in repose was sad and rather grim, but it was a strong, clean face. "Ben," she began wearily, "don't you suppose—"

It was an interrupted sentence. The latest stroke of misfortune for Ben Harper furnished the interruption. It took the form of a sharp and shocking blast of sound at the quarry, which was a little more than a half mile away.

Ben and Ophelia turned in time to see a tangled mass of timbers float smoothly upward toward the serene blue of the Florida sky. This eruption was followed instantly by a cloud of such density and whiteness that it made one think of wonderful and terrible things. It shot above the trees in the form of a mushroom; billowing upward, it was pulled and pushed by air currents until it attained arms and legs and a grotesque head.

"Dynamite?" gasped Ophelia.

"It looks to me like steam," said Ben. "That would mean the boiler."

And he started at a run across the clearing. When Ophelia reached the quarry, he was standing with hands on hips, his sombrero pushed back, contemplating the ruins. There was a cavity, perhaps two feet deep and eight or ten in diameter, where the boiler had stood. The ramshackle shed that had housed it was scattered about like kindling wood. Iron snakes, which had a moment ago been steam pipes, lay in twists and snarls.

The engine, some distance away, had been wrenched from its holding-down bolts. The bedplate was fractured, and the belt that ran from fly wheel to crusher was in tatters at the near end where flying pieces of iron had torn along it. It hung literally by threads. And the boiler, split from end to end, lay where it had flung itself, fifty feet away.

Ophelia ran up to him.

"Was any one hurt?"

"No one was here."

"How—how did it happen, Ben?"

He looked at her dazedly. "It must have gone dry. Some one must have run the water out of it. It was a quarter full yesterday, and the fire's been banked ever since. I usually look at the water gauge first thing in the morning, but this morning I forgot."

"Slim Spain was taking care of the boiler, and I fired him yesterday. I wonder if he's responsible for this; he's treacherous. This engine can be fixed. I'll send Tom to the Majolica machine shop for an oxyacetylene torch, and I'll drive to St. Augustine now and try to pick up a second-hand boiler."

"Let me go for the torch, Ben. There's plenty here for Tom to do."

He hesitated. "Those negroes 'll be drifting around pretty soon, and he ought to pay them off. It's awfully good of you—"

"Don't be silly. I'd love to go, and I'll help Tom pay off when I get back. Will you be home in time for the party?"

"I'll be back by seven."

She watched him go. His feet seemed to drag through the sand. Ophelia clenched her lower lip between her teeth and blinked the mist from her eyes. She heard the sudden, sharp clamor of his ancient roadster behind the shack which he and the Georgia engineer occupied, and the clash of its worn gears.

If he would only admit that he really needed her and wanted her! How she could love that stubborn, childish, unreasonable man!

XIII

BUCK HENIFER was in his bedroom, preparing for the Boggs's party, when Ben let himself into the house. Buck hardly recognized the young man. He had changed from the black sombrero, the plaid woolen shirt, the corduroy breeches, and the cordovan puttees with which all of Vingo was familiar, to a creamy Panama hat, a white collar, a blue serge suit, and black oxfords.

The storekeeper turned from his shaving mirror with a grin.

"Ophelia said to hurry over just as soon as you got back. What luck did you have in St. Augustine?"

"No luck," said Ben.

The grin faded from Buck Henifer's lathered face. "Listen, boy, that bottle of Johnny Walker is on that little table in the corner. Cut us each a drink. Couldn't you find a boiler?"

"I found three," said Ben. "I found a boiler I could have picked up for five hundred dollars. I didn't have the five hundred. And I can't raise the five hundred."

"Wouldn't they trust you for it?"

"They'd trust me as far as to ship it sight draft attached to bill of lading!"

"That means another shut down," said Buck, anxiously.

"It means I'm going to sell out to Zorn."

"You can't do that, Ben!"

"I can't do anything else."

"We'll both hit the rocks at the same time, Ben," the storekeeper declared. "Most of my business comes from your niggers. If you sell out to Zorn, he'll start a commissary of his own. He told me so, dog-gone his hide. He'll have that quarry on a peonage basis before you get out of sight. All right, damn him. Sell out to

Zorn, and we'll go to a South Sea island and lay on our backs the rest of our lives under coconut palm trees. Whenever we get hungry, all we do is kick a tree and catch a nut!"

"Don't be foolish," Harper said.

"It does seem kind of shameful to leave Vingo, though, when the boom might hit her any day," Henifer acknowledged. "Will Boggs was tellin' me he and Angelica are thinkin' real serious of startin' a Vingo boom; run busses out here from Majolica and start a big advertisin' campaign. They're goin' to change the name to Calzada del Rio. Angelica saw it in a book, and it means somethin' about a river. I drew up some plans the other night for the down town section. I was thinkin' of puttin' up a seven-story department store right across the street from the fifteen-story hotel.

"But I guess the South Sea Island idea is better," Buck concluded. "Finish that drink, kid, and let's go. Shall we walk or ride? Let's walk. Do you need another drink before we start?"

"No," said Ben.

It was a clear, starry night. A fresh, salty breeze from the ocean swept over the swamps and hammocks that were round about Vingo.

The two men started across a broom sage field toward the Boggs's house, a half mile away.

"You ain't ever been to one of Angelica's parties, have you?" said Buck. "One thing I like about Will and Angelica is that, with all their money, they're just like they used to be. I'll bet they've cleaned up pretty near a hundred thousand in lucky land deals since the boom started; but you never catch them puttin' on airs. Here they are, throwin' a party for their old friends, when they could just as well be over there at the Majolica Beach Hotel with a shiny imported automobile parked out in front with a chauffeur in uniform, and dancin' to a big swell orchestra. I guess they're sort of attached to these old swamps. You get that way. I'd a sight rather live right here than anywheres on the champagne belt. There's somethin' about these swamps."

They had reached the sandy road that ran past the Boggs's house from the railroad station and on through the swamps to the river. Mules, wagons, and flivvers were parked along the front fence. Some

of the mules were saddled and bridled; others had blanket pads fastened on with rope, and homemade rope halters. The vehicles were in various stages of decay and disrepair. They had come, Ben knew, from miles around, from turpentine stills, tie camps, and remote farms.

The house was a blaze of lights—it boasted the only farm electric lighting plant in Vingo. Some one was jerking out an ancient fox trot on a fiddle, and a murmur of voices came from every window.

Angelica Boggs, flushed and perspiring with excitement, met them at the door. She was slender and fair, a few years older than Ophelia, but with much of Ophelia's vitality.

"Ben Harper!" she cried, seizing his hands. "We were afraid you'd had a breakdown. How are you, Buck? Where's Ophelia? Oh, Ophelia, here he is!"

Ben looked about the room, but did not see Ophelia. He recognized the fiddler, and they exchanged grins. He was a cowboy who lived, with three brothers, near De Land, and frequently drove herds of small, bony cattle through Vingo. They had camped at the quarry one night, had cooked their supper over an open fire and sent him a batch of hot biscuits, which were the most delicious biscuits he had ever tasted.

He saw Mrs. Lally with her brood of five, all seated stiffly upright and terribly self-conscious. Mrs. Lally was dressed in funereal black, and the children were barefoot. They had driven fifteen miles to the party in a mule wagon.

Old Man Newman, who ran a shingle mill over on the river, was a widower, and notoriously anxious to try his luck again. Just now he was learning to fox trot in the arms of a girl with bobbed black hair. She was the prettiest of the numerous Recknor sisters. She wore a pink gingham dress, and her stockings, Ben observed, were rolled down below her knees. She saw him and smiled wearily. Old Man Newman was willing but ponderous.

Ben bowed to Mrs. Garson, who was crocheting lace, and she gave him an embarrassed smile. She had no teeth, and he recalled having heard that Dick Garson had taken her up to Jacksonville recently on the morning train, had all of her teeth extracted, and brought her home that night. He was the foreman of the section gang at Cypress Spoon, and couldn't afford expensive dentistry.

Then he saw Ophelia. She had been hidden behind other dancers, and she was dancing with Harry Zorn. Ben's smile was rather grim as he watched them. Zorn was holding her tightly, and from time to time he nestled his chin in her curly golden hair. There was a dreamy look on Ophelia's face; her lips were moving, and when she stopped talking Zorn said something to her and she smiled.

She caught sight of Ben in the doorway with Angelica when the fiddler stopped playing. With a word to Zorn, she came hurrying over. She was smiling, holding out both hands, and in a slim blue dress she was lovely.

She seized his hands, squeezed them, and her eyes darted from his white collar to his black oxfords.

"Ben, you look so strange in your store clothes I hardly know you."

"I think he looks wonderful!" Angelica put in. "And he doesn't act nervous for an engaged man. When do you children want to make the announcement—at supper?"

Both girls looked at Ben.

"It suits me," he said. "Can I have this dance, Ophelia?"

"I don't know anybody who has a better right to it," said Ophelia.

The cowboy fiddler struck up "Say It With Music," and Ophelia lifted her arms. The toothless Mrs. Garson looked up from her crocheting with a sad, introspective smile. She, too, had once had teeth as beautiful as Ophelia's.

Ben looked over Ophelia's head as they started. Harry Zorn was lounging against the door jamb, staring at him with narrowed eyes. Ben grinned at him. He would tell Zorn in a little while that he could have the quarry at the figure he had named. He was glad that this game of hide and seek was over; he was weary of so much mystery.

The cowboy lowered his fiddle. Ophelia tucked her hand under Ben's arm, and they moved past Zorn out onto the veranda.

"The next dance is mine, isn't it?" said Zorn.

"I'm sorry," said Ben. "I just asked for it."

And he wondered why he had said that. He hadn't asked for the next dance—had intended, in fact, to have it with Angelica or Mrs. Garson.

Buck Henifer, sitting on the rail of the porch with a corn-cob pipe in his mouth,

was talking to Jim Walters, the boss of a tie camp on the other side of the Majolica River.

Ophelia paused beside him. "Having a good time, Buck?"

"Never had a better!"

"Aren't you going to dance with any of the girls?"

"The last time I took Mary Recknor for a whirl," said Buck, "she told me I ought to quit storekeepin' and go in for toe dancin' as a steady business. It was her toes she was talkin' about, though. Besides, dancin' always gives me a terrible thirst."

"Well, there's loads of pop on ice out in the dining room." She looked up at Ben. "Would you like to take a little walk, Ben? I'm warm."

They descended the steps. It was a night of enchantment. The tropical stars did not seem to twinkle; they throbbed, and filled the night with a softly ardent glow.

"Ben," said Ophelia presently, "do you know that this dance is the first thing you've ever asked me for? And you didn't really ask for that. What makes you so happy to-night? You've been wearing a big grin ever since you came."

They had stopped under a bougainvillea vine. A light from an upstairs window fell on Ophelia's upturned face. It was eager.

"You got the boiler!" she exclaimed.

"No; they wouldn't let me have it."

"Oh, gee! Wouldn't they take notes?"

He shook his head, watching her.

"I've decided to sell out to Zorn," he said.

Her eyes widened.

"Oh, no, Ben!" she wailed. "You can't quit now; you mustn't."

He looked at her closely, but her consternation seemed to be genuine. And he wondered again what her game was.

"Promise me," said Ophelia, "you won't talk to Zorn until to-morrow. Ben, haven't you changed your mind about using that money?"

He shook his head firmly.

"Even knowing how much I—I want you to succeed?"

Ben suppressed a bitter smile. "No, Ophelia."

She lowered her head, and the light from the upstairs window fell on her glowing hair. Ben stiffened. He was fighting an almost irresistible impulse—a madly motivated impulse—to seize her in his arms and kiss her on the mouth.

He would seize her and kiss her; then he would tell her what a cheat and a liar he knew her to be. But he fought down that impulse. When Ophelia looked up again he was smiling.

"Ben," she said, "this can't go on. You don't care for me at all. You've never wanted to kiss me. You've never even tried to put your arm around me. I—I thought for a little while you loved me. If you did, you'd let me help you. But you don't. I'm not going to hold you to this engagement. You made a chivalrous gesture the other morning, and—and we aren't engaged any longer. I'll tell Will and Angelica in the morning we decided we just aren't suited. Come on; let's dance."

XIV

THEY returned to the house, and they danced without speaking. Afterward, Ben danced with Angelica, Mrs. Garson, and two of the Recknor sisters. Each of these dances Ophelia had with Harry Zorn, and whenever she met Ben's eyes she looked away. She was no longer smiling; she looked tired and unhappy.

Ben went out on the porch a little later and talked with Buck Henifer and the other men. Few of them were dancing. Their wives and daughters sat inside in a row along the walls and looked on. Some of the men had brought flasks of homemade corn liquor, and their self-consciousness was evaporating. Appetizing odors of frying bacon and smoking coffee came from the kitchen. Plates began to clatter.

Ben saw Ophelia go past the doorway in the tight embrace of Harry Zorn. Then the fiddling stopped, and presently Zorn came out on the porch alone. Ben saw him look at his watch, gaze off with a scowl toward the river, and walk to the railing. He stood there for a full minute, gazing off into the night and nervously drumming on the rail with his short, thick fingers.

While he was standing there Ophelia came to the doorway. She had put on a white apron, and in one hand she carried a pie tin full of yellow cookies. She peered anxiously about her, espied Zorn, and stood perfectly still, holding up the pan of cookies.

To Ben it was all very mysterious. He was sitting in the darkness, and Zorn was evidently unaware of his presence.

Ophelia said softly: "Ben, are you out there?"

As he arose Zorn turned quickly and thrust the watch into his pocket.

"Ben," said Ophelia, "have you seen Will? He didn't know you were out here, and he's been wanting to see you all evening. I think he's in the kitchen. I haven't said anything to him—yet."

Ben found Will in the kitchen carving a boiled ham. He dropped the knife when Ben went in, and his dark face lighted with a grin.

"Hello, Ben! I haven't congratulated you yet." And he warmly shook Ben's hand. "I didn't know how things were going when you spoke to me over at the station the other night, or I wouldn't have been so hasty."

"Oh, that's all right," said Ben. "I might as well—"

"No, it isn't all right. Angelica and I'd been sort of hoping that you and Ophelia would hit it off. We're both admirers of yours, Ben, but you've acted so sort of cold and distant that we didn't know how to break the ice. But now that you're goin' to be one of the family, I guess we can talk right out. Angelica and I have lots of schemes on for makin' money. We want to start a Vingo boom, in the first place, and we want you to come in on it.

"But of course," Will hastened to add, as he saw the troubled look in the other's eyes, "we don't figure on takin' any more of your time than you can easily spare from the quarry. I know that's your job, and I know it's a tough job. I worked there myself before Angelica got into real estate, and I know there's real money in that quarry if it's managed right. All you need is a little capital to swing it, and I'm willin' right now, Ben, to let you have some capital if you'll say we can count on you to help us when we get ready to start boom-ing Vingo."

"But, Will—" Ben Harper vainly tried to interrupt.

"Wait a minute, Ben. Let me finish. We're cashing in on everything we've got, to have enough ready money to swing this Vingo deal when we get ready. The time won't be ripe for another few months, when the tourists begin comin' down thick, and there's no reason why you can't use as much of that money as you'll need until we are ready. By that time you'll have things goin' full blast, and you'll be standin' on your own feet. Let me get this all out of my system, Ben, before we go into details.

"Ophelia was tellin' me to-night how you feel about usin' any of her money, and I don't blame you at all, Ben. I told her you and I would strike a deal somehow, and later on, if the quarry looks like a good, sound investment, you may let her buy in, or she can get in on the ground floor of the Vingo boom. And I'm goin' to let you in on the ground floor, too, Ben. We'll keep as much of it in the family as we can. And with you and me and Angy and Ophelia all workin', we ought to clean up a good-sized fortune between us in the next few years and be able to take life easy before we're old. I'm mighty glad that you and the kid are hitting it off this way. I don't know any man I'd rather have for a cousin-in-law than you, Ben. Supposin' we run in to the bank Monday."

He stopped and looked at Ben expectantly, and Ben found that he could say nothing. He was not an emotional young man. He had learned that, if you do not wish to be hurt, you must starve your emotions; keep them where they belong. And Will Boggs had caught him with his defenses down. He had expected nothing like this from Will; and it was an utterly new experience. Will was welcoming him as warmly into "the family" as if Ben had been a long lost brother.

He could say nothing but a faltering, "It's—it's damned fine of you!"

And before he could phrase a refusal, Angelica had him by the coat sleeve. She was pale and trembling with excitement.

"Ben, come out here; I've got to speak to you—alone."

And she drew him out onto the back porch.

"I don't know what's going on," she said, breathlessly, "but I don't like the looks of things, Ben. That Harry Zorn and Ophelia have been acting so funny all evening. I don't know if he's been trying to make love to her or not, but she's been following him around. He—he's just left! And Ophelia's gone with him or after him, I don't know which."

"Eloping?" said Ben.

"Oh, Ben, it couldn't be anything like that. She's crazy about you. She's flustered every time she hears your name. And she detests Zorn. She's said so, any number of times."

"Well, what's going on?" said Ben.

"Don't you think you ought to follow them and find out? You can use Will's

roadster. It's parked out there in front. You'd better hurry, Ben."

"I will," said Ben, and started down the steps.

More ghosts? Perhaps the mystery was about to be explained at last.

XV

WHEN Harry Zorn abruptly left the house, Ophelia, who had been talking with Mrs. Garson, sprang up and followed as far as the porch steps. She heard the jangle and whine of Zorn's starter. A pair of headlights blinked on; a motor hummed, and the headlights seemed to leap down the road toward the railroad crossing.

Buck Henifer left his perch on the rail and came over.

"What's goin' on, Ophelia?"

She was staring after the vanishing tail light and gripping handfuls of the white apron.

"Buck," she said in a tense little voice, "will you come with me? I've got to follow him, and I'm afraid to go alone."

"Gosh!" cried Buck. "What's up?"

"I'll tell you on the way."

She hastened down the steps, ran down the walk to the gate, and jumped into the roadster. Buck climbed in beside her.

She raced the engine, let in the clutch, and the little roadster fairly leaped.

They flew over the railroad crossing as Zorn's tail light twinkled from sight behind the commissary.

"Do you know why Zorn goes out every Saturday night at approximately the same hour in his motor boat?" Ophelia demanded above the humming motor.

"Why! Don't he go out fishin' over Sunday?"

"Did any one ever see him out fishing?"

"Search me, Ophelia! What 're you gettin' at, anyhow? If he's up to some-thin', I ought to know. I ain't much of a sheriff, but—"

"Buck, I think Zorn is smuggling in liquor from the Bahamas!"

"Good gosh!"

"I've been lying awake nights, trying to reason out his motive for driving Ben out of that quarry. If I'm wrong, I'm terribly wrong. I called up the Federal prohibition enforcement headquarters at Jacksonville on long distance this afternoon, and told them to have men down on the beach to-night, hidden near the end of the path that runs from Zorn's house."

"Why've you been keepin' all this to yourself?"

Ophelia switched off the headlights as they passed the commissary.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand, Buck. Ben Harper thinks all women are cheats and liars. I wanted to prove to him without help from anybody that I am neither. I wanted to come to him with overwhelming proof, and I think I can—now."

"What've you been doin'?"

"I've been getting the goods on Harry Zorn. You've claimed that Zorn wants the quarry to occupy his time without taking him too far into the open. You assumed he's an escaped convict hiding here, but you couldn't prove it. That never did sound convincing to me. I worked out an entirely different theory. I think Zorn wants the quarry to cover up his really important activities."

"Smugglin' licker from Nassau!" Buck ejaculated. "It seems kind of far-fetched, Ophelia. How do you figger he works it?"

"I think he owns one or two seagoing motor boats that he runs between the islands and the beach. It's absolutely deserted there. There isn't a house for miles. I think he beaches the stuff and has it carried down that path to his house every Saturday night. His boat—I looked it over carefully—is a very fast shallow-draft sea skiff. He delivers the liquor to bootleggers along the river and the canals all over this part of Florida. By Sunday morning the stuff is all sold. He makes a pretense of fishing, and is home again some time Sunday afternoon."

"But you haven't any real proof."

"Not an atom. If my assumption is wrong, I'll have to start in all over again. But I do think I have guessed his motive."

"Look here, Ophelia," Buck broke in, "have you got any proof that he's been deliberately tryin' to drive Ben out? You think he was behind all these accidents?"

"I've only actually seen him in action once," said Ophelia, slowing down for the drainage ditch bridge. "I hid in the bushes outside Zorn's house last night, from nine until one. I followed him from his house to that little hammock; and I saw him scare Ben's men off the job by dancing in the moonlight as Addison's ghost!"

Buck was breathless with astonishment.

"I thought," he said finally in a faint voice, "those niggers were dreamin'."

"You could have seen his footprints in the sand next morning, if you'd looked. I did! Buck, if that man can't be arrested for what he's been doing, you men ought to band together and drive him out of Florida."

"On a rail," Buck agreed, vehemently, "tarred and feathered."

The tail light ahead had vanished again. To their right in the star glow loomed the ghostly structure of the quarry. Ophelia swung into the lane that ran from the road to Zorn's house. She drove the roadster into a clump of bristling palmettos.

"If you haven't a revolver," Ophelia said, "you'll find one in that side pocket. You may need it."

Buck secured the revolver, and they alighted. A hundred yards down the lane they passed Zorn's car, likewise pulled off to one side. It was dark.

They crept on down the lane. Ophelia presently grasped his elbow and piloted him across a small clearing into a thicket of cabbage palms. They entered the pine hammock. At length she stopped him.

"This," she said, "is the path that leads to the ocean. Can you see it?"

"I used to know this path," Buck answered. "How far is the house?"

"Not more than two hundred yards."

She drew him into the blacker shadows. A soft thumping of feet on the path was followed shortly by the labored breathing of a man. In the faintly luminous darkness he plunged past them, running at top speed toward the clearing where Zorn's house stood.

Another heavy figure pounded past, likewise gasping for breath. Then a third, and a fourth.

Ophelia squeezed the storekeeper's arm. "Shall we follow them?"

Buck grunted, and they took to the path; hastened toward the house. The clearing opened. A lantern was hanging on a nail driven into a post at the side of the front steps. Zorn, with his hat pushed back, seemed to be surrounded by negroes.

They heard one of them blurring:

"S hundred men ober on dem dunes!"

Then Zorn's heavy, sardonic voice: "What in hell, Blue? Are you seein' ghosts, too?"

"No, suh; ain't seein' no ghosts; seein' a Prohi' behin' ebry palmetto bush!"

The listeners heard Zorn suck in his breath sharply.

"What happened?" he snapped.

"Fust load come in; dey all jumped up. Ah was through checkin'. Eleben Chinks, hondred an' eighty cases ob Scotch, an' three cases ob dope. We fotched de dope along."

"Where're the Chinks?"

"Still on bode. Licker same place. The boat's done pulled out. Reckon we better, too."

"Where's the dope?"

"Dem boxes. All safe, boss."

"You boys have done damned well," said Zorn. "Not a scrap of evidence."

"I'll blow off the roof of the first one of you that moves," said Buck, stepping out into the light.

His voice was thin but hard, and seemed steady.

Ophelia, trembling, followed him.

"Hello, Mr. Zorn!" she said on a nervously shrill note. "Isn't that Blue Allen and Slim Spain and Lightnin'? I didn't know you were on Mr. Zorn's pay roll. Blue, you were in charge night before last when the locomotive slipped off the jacks, weren't you? Yes! And, Lightnin', you were working on the crusher when that big casting fell down between the jaws. And you let the water out of that boiler, didn't you, Slim? Things are—"

A heavy missile, moving through the air swiftly, just missed Ophelia's head. Its impact with the skull of Buck Henifer was sharp and emphatic.

Zorn stepped toward her. She knew that he was about to strike her, but she was so shocked at seeing Buck limp on the sand at her feet that she did not try to protect herself.

The blow was not painful. She saw his clenched fist flashing toward her eyes, and the one thought in her mind was rather irrelevant. It didn't seem possible that a man in whose arms she had recently danced—a man who had within the last hour been making cumbersome love to her—could be striking her. Then an engulfing blackness came.

Zorn picked her up, and cradled her in his arms. He spoke curtly:

"You boys scatter. Make your way down to Little Palm Key. I'll be waiting for you there at the cabin. Throw that dope in the boat before you go."

He prodded the lifeless storekeeper with his toe, and strode down the slope to where the sea skiff was tied. The negroes tossed

the three square tins into the cockpit and vanished.

To the unconscious girl in his arms he said:

"I could wring your damned little neck. You boys gone?" he snapped.

There was no answer.

XVI

To Ben Harper, stumbling down the lane, came the gurgling throb of the sea skiff's exhaust. He could dimly make out the white hull through the foliage and the figure of a man at the wheel, his head projecting slightly above the roof of the low hunting cabin.

That agile craft, he was to learn, had been used for more than two years to transport an infinite variety of contraband, from Chinese to Chartreuse, and from champagne to cocaine, from this lonesome and convenient spot to less lonesome but more convenient spots along Florida's network of inland waterways.

Ben took another step forward.

"Ophelia!" he called. He was sure she was aboard. He wanted to get out there somehow—seize her from Zorn. Yet she loved Zorn!

The sea skiff glided out to mid-channel; its motor coughed, sputtered, roared with full power. He felt suddenly weak and ill.

There was an arresting moan behind him. Buck Henifer was trying to sit up. Ben hastened to him and knelt down. The storekeeper was rubbing his head and mumbling incoherently.

Ben picked him up and stood him on his feet, and Buck clung to him. Blood trickled from a rough bruise on his left temple.

"Where's Ophelia?" Buck gasped.

"It's all right," Ben soothed him.

"She's run off with Zorn."

In the light of the lantern Buck stared at him dazedly.

"Run off with Zorn?" he muttered.

"Here," said Ben. "Sling your arm over my shoulder. I'll help you to the car."

The storekeeper pushed him feebly away.

"You're wrong, Ben. Ophelia got him into a trap, and he sneaked out of it."

"You're dazed," said Ben gently.

"I tell you," Buck insisted, with returning vigor, "she got the goods on Zorn. He's been smugglin' liquor and dope and Chinks into here by the beach and smugglin' 'em

out again in his boat! The revenue men on the beach 'll be comin' along any minute. Ophelia's been spyin' on him for days. She found out his niggers 've been on your pay roll and raisin' all the hell with your plant! Smashin' somethin' every time they got the chance—Slim Spain, Blue Allen, and Lightnin'. She found out Zorn's been playin' every low trick in the bag to force you to sell out to him for next to nothin'. It was Zorn who scared your men off the job last night. Rigged himself out like Addison's ghost—"

"It can't be true," Ben stopped him. "I know who that ghost was. I found her handkerchief in the hammock this morning. It was Ophelia!"

Buck clapped a trembling hand to his forehead.

"Ben, Ben," he groaned, "ain't you ever goin' to get hep to yourself? Ain't you ever goin' to realize that all women ain't liars and deceivers? Don't you know that girl's been workin' day and night to get you out of this mess you're in? What if you did find her handkerchief in the hammock? Couldn't she drop it there while she was followin' Zorn? Ain't you ever goin' to wake up? That girl would cut off her right arm if it would help you! And here you stand—"

Ben had seized him and was shaking him violently by the shoulders.

"Why didn't you tell me all this before?" he snapped. "We'll head him off. Come on!"

"How can you head him off now?" Buck panted, as he stooped to recover Ophelia's revolver from the ground.

Ben pulled him at a run down the lane. The first car they reached was Zorn's. He dragged the storekeeper into the seat beside him.

With a savage gesture he switched on headlights and ignition. They seemed suddenly to be flying through space. Ben's objective was the small, low bridge spanning the river on the Dixie Highway. To reach the broader reaches of the Majolica and, eventually, the restless blue of the Atlantic, it was necessary for the sea skiff to pass under the bridge.

They sighted the luminous white hull bearing down upon the bridge when Ben applied the brakes and brought the car to a stop in the center.

Ben scrambled out and leaped upon the rail on the down river side as the boat shot

under. He dropped the instant its bows reappeared, and alighted on hands and knees on the roof of the long cabin.

Zorn switched off the engine and vaulted to the roof to meet him. Ben flung himself at him as he came. They met with a thump that jarred the hull, the crackling of a fist upon bone.

Zorn staggered backward, clawing at the air. He fell splashing into those waters which are so justly notorious for their active alligator life.

The sea skiff coasted on and came to rest on a mud flat to the right of the channel, and Zorn reappeared far astern, swimming for shore.

"Ophelia!" Ben cried.

He dropped down into the cockpit.

She sat with her head drooping, her body wedged into the corner formed by the after wall of the cabin and the side of the cockpit. Her hands lay in the lap of the white apron, palms up, the fingers limply curled.

"Ophelia!" he groaned.

He lifted her to her feet and infolded her fiercely in both arms. Her head fell back and rested on one of his forearms.

Ophelia's eyes were partly open; she opened them wider. She struggled a little, but he held her so firmly that she could not move.

Her lips parted slightly in what, in the faint diffusion of the headlights on the bridge, resembled a smile.

His arms about her were trembling. He was trembling all over. He kissed her.

"Ophelia—dearest!"

"Yes, Ben!"

"Can you forgive me?"

"I—I thought you were the coldest man in Florida!"

"I've been the stupidest man in the world!"

"You don't think I'm a liar and a cheat any more?"

He groaned again. "Will you forgive me? This evening has taught me what a fool I have been. Ophelia, you—you've opened my eyes. I love you so!"

She tried to see his face. In the distance, in the full glare of the headlights, Buck Henifer was standing on the bank, his legs apart, a revolver gripped firmly in his hand, waiting to receive the feebly swimming man in the water. An automobile drew up behind the one parked on the bridge. The revenue men had finally picked up the trail; but Ophelia saw none

of this. She pulled Ben's head down on her shoulder with a happy little sigh.

"I think," said Ophelia gently, "that

what you need more than anything else is some real mothering. And I think—well, I think you're in very good hands!"

THE END

Women: Nobody Can Make 'Em Out

A FURTHER BIT OF PROOF THAT A MAN SHOULD EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED WHERE A WOMAN IS CONCERNED

By Homer Croy

WHEN Jessie Masters married Charley Hepburn she thought he was the most wonderful man in the world, and then she found that he threw cigarette ashes on the floor. It took her about six years to cure him of that, and, the day she pronounced him fit to live with, he began to throw his old razor blades behind the bathtub. She got him an old broken teacup and put it in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, and it looked as though everything would be all right, until a cake of soap slipped out of Jessie's hand and she had to get down on her knees and feel under the bathtub. That evening there was a scene in the Hepburn home that the neighbors would have given almost anything to hear.

"I don't see how you put up with him," said Edna Jones, who was Jessie's best friend, and hence gave a great deal of bad advice.

Charley was cashier in the Troost Park Bank in Kansas City, although he had been only a clerk when he and Jessie had gone away to paradise together on West Woodlawn Avenue. He had a nice car, belonged to a dandy golf club, and was generally getting ahead in the world, although he was close-lipped about his business.

"I don't want to bring my office to my home," he said now and then.

In fact, Jessie had done the best of any of the girls in her set, but she thought of this only occasionally. Being human, she

thought about the cigarette ashes and the razor blades.

"I don't see why he has to do those maddening things," she complained.

"Other men don't," declared Edna Jones.

She meant R. L. Groot, who was in the cast iron pipe business and had made a great deal of money, as so often happens in businesses that no one ever hears of. Groot was ten years older than Charley, and probably a hundred times richer. In fact, he was the largest depositor in the bank where Charley was cashier. He had been married, but after fifteen years of it his wife had gone off to a belated reward. He was now just beginning to step around again. Groot, in spite of his name, was a polished gentleman, and now that he had made enough cast iron pipe to live on the rest of his life was looking for something new.

He and Jessie had met at the country club, where Groot spent more time than he did at the pipe works, and in spite of herself Jessie began to play more golf than she had in years.

Sometimes she told herself that she would not play any more, and then Charley would go to sleep after dinner while she was telling him what a hard time she had had shopping. Sometimes she thought Charlie looked worried, and sometimes in the night he would twitch, and now and then moan.

"It's because you drink too much coffee," she explained.

Jessie did not drink coffee.

Now and then she thought to herself: "How uninteresting he is!"

Groot, on the other hand, was entertaining and quite jolly, and also there was the fact that Groot was a Harvard graduate; Charley had gone one year to the State University, and then to a business college. When she had first married him she had thought of him as a college man; then she had met Groot.

Probably the most provoking thing about Charley was that he came to the table in his shirt sleeves.

"I don't see why it isn't all right when we're alone," he remarked.

"Because it isn't polite," Jessie replied. "It's common. Nice people don't do it."

"If they were as tired as I am, they would," said Charley.

II

ONCE or twice Jessie threatened to leave him if he didn't pick up and do better. This was before she met Groot.

One day Jessie gave a tea at the country club for the Entre Nous Club, which was her own set, and where the ladies looked one another over carefully. By chance Groot came in from the golf links—that is, it may have been by chance. She had asked Charley to come, but he couldn't get away from work.

"You must come and have a saucer of tea with us," Jessie said brightly to Groot, as she always did in his presence. "I'll promise to protect you."

Groot was the life of the party, and kept them all going. When he saw two or three ladies talking, he rushed up and leaped into the conversation, until pretty soon everybody was shouting. It was considered the most successful tea in months.

Groot had a way among ladies. He could talk to two or three at once, and make each one think he was interested in her alone. He liked to carry things for the ladies, and made more of a ceremony of picking up a handkerchief than a movie star could make coming down a ten-thousand-dollar staircase; and when he gallantly held a match to a cigarette it was as if the king had tapped somebody on the shoulder with a ceremonial sword.

He was tall and elegant, and had what the men's clothes ads call "distinction"; while, on the other hand, there was nothing distinguished about Charley unless it was

his ears. This was before mothers knew about bandaging 'em back.

Jessie came home from the tea excited and pleasantly exalted. She thought it was because her tea had been a great success. Charley was in his den working and, as she thought, probably spilling cigarette ashes on the rug. He had been more moody than ever lately, and twice recently had got up during the night and gone to his desk in the den to work.

The maid announced dinner—up until two years ago Charley had called it supper—and Jessie went down, fresh and blooming. Charley was late, as he always was. One thing he couldn't do was to get to meals on time. That is, except to breakfast; then off like a flash to business. He hadn't been late to the bank in years.

"Go ahead and serve," she said to the maid.

Formerly Jessie had stood about, waiting and telling the maid to keep things hot until Charley finally came. Now she plunged in, rather hurriedly. She had finished her soup when Charley entered the dining room with a strained expression on his face.

"I'd think you could wait a minute or two," he remarked, but not with too much resentment.

"If I had a dollar for every hour I've waited for you, they could have Florida," Jessie declared. "Other men don't keep people waiting on them."

Things had come to the state where she was beginning to throw up other men to him. Other men are the most perfect works of God.

Charley was in his shirt sleeves and had taken off his collar. The brass button was bobbing like a buoy at sea. All her repressed resentment at his shortcomings rose up within her.

"I'm not going to eat dinner with you if you don't respect me enough to dress decently!" she cried with sudden heat.

"I'm so tired to-night," Charley protested. "I will next time."

"That's what you have been saying ever since we were married. You haven't ever changed a single one of your bad habits. You just go on and get sloppier and sloppier, and you—" She stopped, for the maid, with the little cap that Jessie had found at a fashionable outfitting store, came in, as maids always do at such times. Jessie tilted her soup plate and scraped up another drop. "Expect me to keep on

living with you," she finished in a coarse whisper that didn't even get to the pantry door. "Well, I'm not going to do it. I've got my own life to lead, and I'm going to lead it in my own way."

She had not meant to say so much, but once she had started she could not stop.

"Why, what do you mean, Jessie?" Charley asked in surprise. "You mean, just on account of me not having my coat and collar on? Why, those things aren't very important. Everybody does things that grate on other people. You do, too."

"Nothing vulgar like that," Jessie asserted. "You heard what I said."

"Leave the table, then, if you want to. I'm not going to be bulldozed into doing it to-night."

III

WORDS continued to multiply, as those busy little mathematicians do on such occasions as those supplied by a discontented wife and a jeering husband.

Putting on her hat and coat, Jessie went down to the Kansas City Club and had the biggest and most expensive dinner she had had in months. And then she signed Charley's name with resentful distinctness. Groot came in during the course of the evening, as immaculate as a man in a cigarette ad.

"Say, this is luck," he announced. "By gracious!" And he rubbed his hands slightly.

"Charley had to go to a meeting," Jessie explained, a bit hurriedly, "so I ran down here."

"I believe Charley neglects his little wife," said Groot.

"Oh, no, he doesn't," returned Jessie.

A moment later she was surprised at herself for defending him.

"Anyway, I think we should dance a little to celebrate the occasion," Groot suggested; and they hunted up a grill where an orchestra was sighing and moaning and groaning away, such as an orchestra finds it necessary to do these days.

Jessie flashed the corners of her eyes over the room, but there was nobody she knew, and then she gave herself up to the delights of dancing. Groot had music in his feet and danced splendidly. Now and then Jessie thought of Charley, for Charley was the kind of a husband who gives up dancing as soon as he gets married. She dropped her handkerchief, and Groot returned it with

the manner of Sir Walter Raleigh in his prime.

"I suppose we had just as well have a little something to eat," said Groot, and ordered supper, and ate it in a way that would have thrilled Emily Post. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the picture. Jessie thought of the other meal earlier in the evening.

It was quite the most pleasant and charming evening that Jessie had spent in a long time. At first she had been uneasy lest somebody she knew should see them, but after a time she did not care.

"Let them look if they want to," she said to herself.

Constantly in her mind was the contrast between Charley and Groot. She thought of all Charley's shortcomings—the long meals they had eaten when he had issued only a few grunts in the way of table conversation; his habit of putting cigarette stubs in the coffee cup when she had placed an ash tray two inches in front of his plate; of how he had never been known to close a bureau drawer; and his way of stretching out on the day bed with his feet on the best pillow. That last, probably, was when he came nearest to death.

"This has been such a pleasant evening," said Groot, "that I wish we could have another like it. When is Charley going out again?"

"M-maybe in a week. I—I don't know."

When she got home there was a light in Charley's den—he was still fussing with the papers which were consuming so much of his time recently. Briefly Jessie wondered if it was anything to do with the bank, and then her quick eye caught a litter in the dining room.

Charley had got out the percolator and made himself some coffee, and had ravaged the ice box. It was his maddening way. And then he had left the percolator stand with the unconsumed coffee and grounds in it. Crumbs were scattered over the table.

"I could wring his neck!" Jessie exclaimed mentally, as a million wives must have done as they have come upon such devastating scenes.

And then she went into her own room and clicked the key with satisfaction. Charley's picture was standing on the bureau in a leather frame, and as she went by she accidentally knocked it off. At least, she thought it was an accident. She did not pick it up.

The next morning Charlie had breakfast, and was off to work before she got up.

IV

WHEN Jessie got out of bed she picked up the photograph and put it back on the bureau where it belonged. A moment later she wiped the dust off it. Jessie always did the upstairs work herself, and when she went into Charley's room the place looked as if a couple of elephants had slept in it, as a room always did after Charley had inhabited it. His pyjamas were in the middle of the floor; the bathroom was splashed, and there was a safety razor blade on top of the medicine cabinet where Charley had now taken to throwing them. And on the wash bowl was a fresh collection of cigarette ashes.

Edna Jones came in for her usual morning interruption, and Jessie told her all that had happened the night before.

"I don't blame you in the least," said Edna, who knew just about that much about life. "Why shouldn't you have a little pleasure as you go along? People don't look on marriage as they used to. It's no shame to get divorced now. This ball-and-chain business is passing away. Besides, there are no children."

After Edna had gone the phrase lingered in Jessie's mind—ball and chain. That's what life with Charley was—a chain forged of a million little links of cigarette ashes, razor blades, open bureau drawers, collar buttons, and coffee percolators. Now, life with Groot would be different!

Jessie went out again with Groot, and at each meeting she felt the lift of eagles' wings. Groot grew more and more wonderful. Sometimes a feeling of sorrow for Charley came over her, and her old tenderness for him flamed up in her—and then she would come across a fresh litter of cigarette ashes. She struggled with herself whether she should tell him or not, and just as she would bring herself to it she would put it off. Maybe something would happen meanwhile.

Finally she put the picture in the bureau drawer.

If Charley suspected, he did not show it. He continued in his groove of worry, smoking too much, with spells of abstraction, and a growing irritableness. Sometimes in the night she would hear him thumping around in his den; next morning the cigarette ashes would be thicker than

ever. Now and then he went out for long walks in the middle of the night. She resented him not suspecting. He was too confident of her—which, of course, is something no woman can stand.

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, it *did* happen. She had told Charley one evening that she was going to call on Edna, and when she came from an hour with Groot he walked almost to the door, which he had been doing lately. The light was not in Charley's work den, as she had come to expect; instead, the whole house was illuminated, and she heard voices. She listened a moment, and recognized one of them as Mr. Russell's. Mr. Russell was manager of the bank where Charley worked. She had an impending fear.

As she came in she made a noise; the excited voices grew silent for a moment, and then the den door closed behind them, and she could hear only a threatening rumble. The door opened some time later, and a strangely white Charley came in.

"I suppose you have guessed what it is," he announced in a clear, high voice. "I knew it would come, but I didn't think it would come so soon. I have defaulted at the bank for twenty thousand dollars."

The blow had fallen. The amount was small in comparison to the sums usually found missing on such occasions.

"He admits that he used it in speculation and in trying to get rich quick," said Mr. Russell. "Sometimes the families of such men get to living too fast, and they steal to give to their families; but"—he looked around—"he didn't. It was pure selfishness. I've called a meeting of the board of directors for to-morrow morning, and then we'll decide what to do. I think it would be best for two of us to stay here to-night."

Jessie knew what it would mean—the scandal, the sensation in the newspapers. Even though their house was sold and more money borrowed, as Mr. Russell hinted, to straighten things out and to help lighten the sentence, Charley later would have to go to another city and start again, possibly under another name. Even under the most favorable circumstances it would be a long, bitter, trying climb.

Jessie telephoned for Edna to spend the night with her, and the shocked and aggrieved Edna came.

"I'm not surprised," she declared. "I don't want to be cruel; but, after all, it

may be for the best. You know, Charley has always got on your nerves in little things, and now he's done something really serious. It's your chance. No one will blame you."

V

THE next morning, while Charley was at the meeting of the board of directors, Groot came to the house, paler and more determined than she had ever seen him. The light, merry air with which he usually greeted her was gone; now he was intensely earnest and possessive.

"I've heard all about it, dearest," he said without waiting for her greeting. "Of course, you know what I think of a man who will do a thing like that. You won't have any trouble now in getting a divorce from him. We will set about it at once. I think I can turn the trick quickly, and then we will get married."

Jessie broke into a burst of suffocating tears.

"I—I don't know," she replied; and then repeated it: "I—I don't know."

The test had come, and Groot waited.

Charley was not a perfect husband; his little annoying faults had driven her almost to distraction, and he would never be any better. The world would be against him; every hand would be raised to strike. She knew what remaining by him meant—the long struggle back to respect. But, after all, he was her husband, and now that the decision must be made, she remembered the many splendid things about him—brave, generous things about him that no one else in the world knew.

"Come, dear," Groot urged. "We must make our plans."

"No," she announced with sudden full decision, "I won't. Charley needs me. I don't care what people are going to say about him—I know at bottom what a really fine man he is. I've always known it, and I'm not going to throw him over just because he's got into trouble. Now is the time he needs me most of all, and I'm going to stand by him. You must go now, Mr. Groot."

And the stunned, bewildered man went.

A GREEN ROOFTREE

WHEN sunbeams fall o'er crag and wall,
When pink and poppy blow,
I'd like to be as breezes free
And careless onward go.
Where roses nod o'er clovered sod,
When birds are in the tree,
By fen and lake and field and brake,
A gypsy life for me.

But when the wold is bleak and cold,
And snows are drifted deep,
When song of bird no more is heard
And maples leafless sleep.
Then I can jest and loaf and rest,
From every longing proof,
With book oft read and overhead
A mossy, green home-roof.

Though gypsy blood, a rolling flood,
May lure my feet away,
Four circling walls, the voice that calls
My soul and bids it stay.
Though paths are free from sea to sea
Their lure hath cloven hoof,
A broad-boughed tree, spells heaven for me,
A mossy, green home-roof.

L. Mitchell Thornton

Without Mercy

A JURY OF WOMEN AND MEN NEVER WILL AGREE IN THIS
CASE OF LAURA HILLIS AGAINST THE WORLD

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

COMPTON knew the road. It had not changed in the ten years since he had seen it.

He knew what lay a few miles ahead—an unpainted rambling house; its stable, cow shed and feed barn, trailing behind it, one roof over all. He knew exactly where he was going, and why—to see Laura Hillis once more.

He was not sure of finding her at the old place. But every mountaineer knew where all others lived; knew histories; lived upon them. Strangers in the Hillis house would know of her.

They might even recognize him—he was taking that chance. But he must lay the ghost of the girl he had known there. Her vision bothered him in the nights; sometimes when he slept; nearly always when he lay awake.

It did not disturb him during the days, for they were too full for an old story like Laura Hillis. His life was crowded, successful and happy. It was the subconscious that made visions of the past, and they annoyed him amazingly.

But he had not made the long trip to the heart of the mountains just to see her. He had happened up there with a party of gay friends. He came unthinkingly.

Then the first time he slept, he had a sight of her—her odd metallic hair had glowed, her lithe figure had passed before him. She had been a lovely thing: no girl he had ever known was lovelier—none. And she had loved him.

The road curved along the edge of the river and was steep, the mountainside towering—all with a lining of goldenrod. There was a polleny scent lying in the warm sun. No breath of air came, but a soft, grateful heat, thick with perfume; the ground was sandy under his feet. The tip

of Slide Mountain ahead had its old trick of seeming close.

II

He turned his head sharply—so strong was the feel of Laura's presence.

He did not remember the red house he was approaching. It looked too new, spick and span, to edge the old road.

A woman came to the open window to watch him go by.

Compton took off his hat and smiled to her. He knew the value of his smile, and the woman instantly put up her hands to smooth her hair and smiled, too.

"I am looking for people named Hillis who used to live around here. Can you tell me of them?"

"I don't know," she said with a preening motion at her hair again. "Maw!" calling back into the room. "Maw! No Hillises round here now, is they?"

An old woman peered over her shoulder and whispered. The two consulted briefly and stared at Compton.

"Ye don't mean Laurey Hillis?"

"Yes! Yes, I do. Does she live near here now?"

They whispered again.

The old woman shoved the other aside to have a better view.

"She's married t' Harve Matthews. They lives three mile ahead."

He thanked them and went on. Glancing back, he saw that they had come out on the porch to watch him, and were talking together eagerly.

Married! Of course she was married. But the ghost of her was not to be laid by that. There was a reason for wanting to see her, a reason that labeled him a cur.

It was good to find her married. He had never wanted to marry her himself. Why

had those women whispered together and stared at him? Could the older one have remembered him—or—what?

III

HE climbed slowly. It was nearly all climb, and not as easy as ten years before when she and he had walked those roads. Did she, he wondered, take the hills as easily now as then, hardly touching the ground?

How she had glowed! Damned pity that so much life and beauty could not have been his; that it had to be a summer's folly—and that was all.

He was tired. Three miles more. Was he a fool? Again a fool? He knew there was no way back to town but to walk, for the railroad tracks were on the other side of the river.

Yes, a tremendous fool, probably. Better let her memory alone.

But it was not bad for a man to have something to romance about. It kept him young.

He decided suddenly that he would cross the river at the first bridge and take a train back to town, or pick up a conveyance of some kind. This was a back road, and not much traveled.

He'd save his romance—not take a chance of destroying it. And he was no longer a mountain climber; ten too busy and too gay years had taken it out of him.

A man, cutting weeds, looked up slantingly at Compton's greeting:

"How far until there is a bridge across the river?"

The man ceased the motion of his scythe.

"Wagon bridge? They ain't none."

"How far until there is?"

"Wall—Barton's, 'bout twelve mile."

"Twelve miles! Can't I get across the river before that!"

"Wall—there's th' railroad bridge ahead. Most of 'em walks that. It brings ye out t' the station."

"Walk a trestle bridge across the river! Suppose a train came?"

The man grinned.

"Trains ain't s' many. They's pretty scarce up here."

"Can't you drive me back to town?"

The man shook his head.

"Ain't got nothin' t' drive ye in. But th' woman at th' nex' house takes folks 'crost th' river in her boat, ef it ain't leakin'

too much. Sometimes her man keeps it fixed, an' then she rows folks acrost. She charges for it. Where ye from?"

He was surveying Compton's knickerbockers and hose, his gaze traveling with interest. "Stayin' up here?"

"At Brierly Inn."

"H-m!" There was awe in the tone. "They charges more as ten dollars a day there, doesn't they?"

"Oh, not as much as that," said Compton, and walked on.

Yes, he'd give the whole thing up. She'd probably be a disappointment anyhow. The gnawing secret—better let that alone, too.

IV

THE next house—owning the boat which might not be leaking—was high above the river, which lay broad with sand bars rearing and a slow current between them. He could see the railroad bridge curving sharply from the woods to the river.

Oh, blast it! He couldn't walk that! It was too long, very skeleton-like and high. No! Dangerous!

A sign, "Maple sugar for sale," hung from the unpainted and sagging house. The place was cluttered with old farm machinery, tumbled beehives and leaning stacks of firewood. Some shabby cows were in front, and chickens fled flapping from his approach. There was no path, and he made his way twistingly through the disorder.

A woman was washing clothes on the front porch. A new wind whipped her calico skirt about her ankles and tore at her slat sunbonnet. She shook her hands from the suds, straightened, and turned to see him—turned as if visitors were not common and not welcome.

"Will you take me across the river?" he asked.

The place was distasteful; no need to smile or even to lift his hat here.

The porch was littered, as was the doorway, with the disorder of wash day and previous days. A baby sat spread-legged on the floor.

The woman did not answer. The wind outlined her—calico sheathing, sagging breasts, stooped shoulders—the figure of the mountain woman who has let herself go.

He could not see her face in the depths of her bonnet. She stooped and picked up the baby, held it close; her hand, wrinkled and swollen from the hot water, spread out

over its back—its round head had some up-standing yellow hair.

He repeated his question. She took off her sunbonnet before she seemed to hear.

"My prayers are answered," she said then, clearly. "I have waited a long time."

V

FAMILIARITY came to her face—slowly. First, it was because the eyes were set far apart; because they were a bit slanted and the lashes curled—

"Laura! My God!"

"Yes, say it! I would, too, if I were you."

"You! Like this! Doing this!"

She looked at the tubs.

"Oh, there are worse things than to wash."

He came close and put out both hands. She shook her head.

"Better not touch my hands. They wouldn't suit you."

"Laura—I'm hunting you. It's why I'm up here."

"You haven't asked for me, have you? They wouldn't tell you. They don't know me any more—the most of the mountain folks. There isn't a woman on this mountain who has spoken to me for ten years. The men speak."

She laughed. "No. I've been alone for ten years. I haven't a friend—not one."

"I didn't suppose they—"

"No, ye didn't suppose. Th' girls up here gets inter trouble, but their men marries them an' that makes it right. It's the marryin' that counts. So they don't speak to me who done th' same, all but the marryin'. That's th' crime—t' let the men go an' leave ye."

He was struck by the way she talked, half of what she said was as her college year had taught her—the other half was in the vernacular of the mountains. It was half of each—half of the girl he knew and half of the place.

She waited, apparently, for him to speak. Then she shifted the baby so that its cheek lay against hers; smoothed its clothes and held it shield wise across her breast.

"Your baby?" He could not think of a suitable thing to say.

"Yes, mine. I have one every year. And they die. That's what the Lord has done to me. He lets 'em come an' takes 'em away. An' they suffer, too—pore little things; none of 'em strong enough t' live—

an' a good thing for 'em. None of 'em like real babies. That's what th' Lord has done t' me. What's he done t' you—th' Lord?"

Compton could not speak—only look at her.

"He ain't punished you. You're healthy. Ev'ry look o' ye shows a good time. Ye're fat! An' ye had a good time gettin' fat! Th' Lord has seen fit not t' do nuthin' t' you—t' let you go. He's looked from me t' you an' done nuthin'. Why was my sin worse'n yours? Why punish me? Ten years of it. Either He's forgot or He ain't just."

"Laura! I have been punished. I have not been able to get rid of the thought of you. I've wanted to know—how you were getting on. I supposed, of course, you had married."

"Married. Have you?"

"Yes."

She laughed.

"I've be'n comparin' Harve—the man who married me—with you all these years. He wasn't like you. You—fat—lines in your face. They twist about your eyes. They tell. And I've hated all Harve said and did because he wasn't like you."

VI

THE baby fretted under her tight clasp. She shifted it again, and murmured to it—a casual murmur.

"Yes, I've hated Harve," she went on. "And you, too. But I've hated you differently—queer—with the hate that is like love. He's not like you; hasn't no polish an' all that. He's jest honest; jest taken care o' me; not askin' no questions. He wanted to get a job somewhere where folks didn't know 'bout me. An' I wouldn't even answer him when he talked about it. I wanted t' stay here. I thought ye'd come back some day, an' I wanted t' show ye what ye'd made o' me. I wanted t' be here when ye did come."

She laughed again.

"Ye see, I was all mixed up. I couldn't tell how I'd feel when I see ye. So I waited on an' never helped Harve er nuthin'. He's had a time with me. I wouldn't clean up, er let him. Why clean an' try t' be like folks? Ye see, I took it hard. And I've prayed to see you, so as to know how I'd feel. I'm much obliged to you for coming. I'll be better now."

She was picking at the baby's clothes, and her eyes were oddly dilated.

"Yes—it busted me. And not you—not you at all. It isn't fair."

Her voice—with sometimes the old softness and grace of speech—slipping into the untrained tone and words— Laura! What a fool he had been to come!

"Is there anything in the world I could do for you?"

"Yes. Go away, now that I have seen you."

There was that question that he had come to ask—so that it would not torment his sleep—the pull of that question. But he didn't dare ask it.

"Go away," she repeated. "We have nothing to talk about."

He wanted to go. There was a strained, hysterical threat about her. He tried to speak naturally.

"Will you row me across the river, Laura?"

"Why should I wait on you? There's the river and the boat. Row yourself."

"But how shall I get the boat back to you?"

"Row it back. Then row yourself over again. Then row it back again to me—keep it going! That would be gay entertainment beside what I have had for ten years. Go on, and row yourself, or walk the railroad bridge."

VII

HE believed she was unbalanced. There was something very wrong in her manner and speech—much menace in this strange woman. Walk the bridge? He could—he would—anything but to prolong this.

"Are you afraid of a railroad bridge? There's lots to be afraid of in these mountains," she taunted.

"I'll walk the bridge. No chance of a train coming at this hour, is there?" He tried to speak as if she were any one else.

"No. No train," she said, and turned her back.

He could not speak a casual word like "good-by." He walked silently away toward the abutments of the bridge that showed through the trees.

Laura! Incredible! Impossible! There lay the ribbon wooded road along which in other days—sweet and lovely—loving him—

He walked fast, glad to get away. Well—he must forget it in a hurry. He had no business to have uncovered that past; he might have known that mountain people

were queer. He did know it. They were not like others; they were brooding, desperate; they never forgot—never forgave. They lived with their vengeance. They executed.

He climbed the fill to reach the railroad track. The bridge stretched long, high, and flimsy before him. Better walk the other twelve miles than trust himself on that open-work thing.

She had taunted him with being afraid. He was. But she was watching and scorning, and he had walked trestles in his youth.

He stepped out on the ties and walked slowly, to become used to the space beneath before he should be out over the water. Oh, it was not so bad! He was already quite a distance out, and not dizzy. He'd hold his head.

"Mister! Mister!" It was a shrill scream behind him. He stopped carefully and turned his head. A child was standing on the track where he had entered the bridge. Both arms were high over her head—a tiny figure outlined—never to be forgotten.

"Mister! Jump! It ain't far! It's soft! Jump! Ye gotta!"

There was another sound—growing—thundering—a stream of smoke—from around the curve, a flash that glittered in the sun.

"Jump!"

He dropped to his knees, seized the ties, and went between them. The ground rushed to meet him—the world was a flare of shrieking whistles and grinding wheels and hissing steam.

VIII

HE landed on top of a mass of bushes—alders and young willows and sumacs—strong and resilient. He came to himself at once and moved. There was a stinging pain through one shoulder. He heard running feet and saw the child springing down the fill to him.

"Be easy! Be easy!" she called. "Did ye hurt ye? Wait!"

She was efficient; she helped him from the bushes and straightened him on the ground. He could not lie down because of the shoulder.

"My shoulder hurts," he said, as she hung anxiously above him. "I'm afraid it is dislocated."

"Aw, that's too bad! But you're heavy. I've jumped from that far out lots of times

jest for fun, an' never did nuthin' t' myself. Is it bad?"

"I can stand it." He smiled at her, and her quick and answering smile went straight and warmly through him.

"I had t' call t' ye," she said apologetically, remembering her screams.

"Yes—I'd be dead if you hadn't."

"Ye shouldn't go on them there trestles 'cept when ye know 'bout the trains."

"I had asked. I was told there were no trains now."

"Who tole ye?"

She was very alert, this child. Her face was thin and pointed, her hair in two pig-tails. It was flaming hair that shone—her eyes were far apart—

"What is your name," he asked, his voice tight.

"Laurey Matthews."

He closed his eyes—his question was answered—the one he had feared to ask.

"Who tole ye there wan't no trains now?" she demanded.

He motioned to the house through the trees.

"Not m' mother. She didn't tell ye. 'Cause m' mother, she knows 'bout the trains."

She straightened his clothes about him and touched him gently, her face alight.

"Mother couldn't a tole ye, mister."

"No, it was not your mother." He lied because it was the time to lie.

"Was it a woman leadin' a horse?"

"Y-yes."

"I saw her. She's a stranger, an' she'd better look out—tellin' folks thataway. She'll get somebody kilt yet."

He sat with his eyes closed—the years were racing past. She prodded him carefully, to see if he had fainted.

"Better let me get ye t' my house. Mother 'll see t' ye. She'll take ye 'crost th' river an' get ye on th' train. They ain't no doctor near 'n town."

"Laurey—how old are you?"

"I'm goin' on ten."

IX

Oh, life! A little bare-legged child in a scant brown frock; broad tanned forehead; a wide white part in her hair; a slim little child that smiled eagerly. Oh, life! Oh, life!

She waited silently. It seemed to him, as they sat half crouched there among the sumacs, that going back to the city—the

crowded streets, the rush of business, a silent house—was impossible.

He hadn't known about the touch of small hands before—although, somehow, he had missed them in an idle, selfish world—that was why he had talked to children on the streets—why his childless home was lonely.

"Don' ye think we'd better be goin'? D'ye feel sick?" she asked anxiously.

"No. I'm just thinking."

She waited again.

"Ye ain't in no hurry, mister," she suggested uneasily.

"No, I'm not in a hurry."

"Maybe it might get bad if it ain't fixed quick. That's what Mis' Grant's leg did, an' it swoled up fearful. Ye kin lean on me. I'm strong."

What could he do? What was there to do? Would the strange woman back there listen to an appeal? No, she would not.

He struggled a hand into a pocket.

"Laurey—this tells where I live in the city. Will you show it to your mother after I have gone? And will you tell her that you are the only little girl I ever wanted? Could you remember to tell her that? Do you love your mother very much, Laurey?"

"Love m' mother! W'y, mister, how can ye ask that?"

Then there must be tenderness left—something that was not hard and threatening back there at the house.

"I think we'd better be goin'," she insisted. "Just lean hard on me."

He edged to his feet.

"It's jest a little ways. Mebbe it don't hurt s' much now?"

He said it did not.

"Lean hard. I'm strong for nearin' ten," she said as they turned into the cluttered yard.

X

He did not believe the woman had moved from where he left her. The baby had gone to sleep spread out on the porch floor; the suds in the tubs had flattened. She stood as he had left her.

"He was a walkin' th' bridge!" cried the child excitedly. "He nearly was kilt but for me, muther. Sit down on the bench here, mister, an' I'll run an' see ef th' boat leaks."

She fled away, and Compton sat dizzily down on a bench by the house.

"The Lord didn't let me take his place," Laura said, the new voice sliding into the old one. "I've tried for years to understand the Lord. When you came to-day, I thought I'd take justice into my own hands, as He seemed to forget. You needed justice."

He held to the edge of the bench, physical pain beating through him.

"I couldn't think of anything worse than being caught on a bridge by a train. You'd be walking along, thinking how smart you were to hold your head. Then you'd hear something—a tingle of the rails, maybe—you'd be startled—afraid. My God, how afraid you would be! And you'd balance yourself on the ties so you could look back—and you'd see smoke."

He saw the picture of himself, too—so strongly and fiercely she spoke.

"I pictured it—you seeing it sweep round the curve—you balancing and waving for it to stop—seeing it try—knowing it couldn't. And what would you think about as it came? Me? Pretty like I used to be? Holding me? My lips? God! I ran to the tree there, not to miss it. It was right. It was sacred. If I'd seen it strike you—I'd a made the sign of the Cross!"

She was watching him curiously.

"And then I saw Laurey. I heard her call you—I knowed ye wouldn't a knowed what t' do. Ye wouldn't jump. Ye'd wait too long. But I didn't dare stop her from callin'—because it was *her*. Another child I could—but not Laurey. She'd remember seein' it. It wan't fair to her to let her see her father go down."

Close behind Compton there was movement—a step. He turned his head painfully. A man was standing in the door; he had seen many such men in the mountains—strong, virile, brown, unsmiling—a man who would swing as he walked. Harve Matthews stood in his own door. How much had he heard? How little?

Compton could not judge. There was only the straight look of the mountain man, who does not show emotion. He sat down on the edge of the porch.

His wife looked at him bewilderedly; she pressed both hands under her chin, and held her face tightly thus.

"There, there, Laurey," he said slowly. "Don't git nervous agin. Ye're all right."

"Yes, yes, I'm all right. Harve—"

"There, there, Laurey. Don't take on."

"I won't. I won't. Oh, Lord—dear

Lord—you didn't let me do it! You sent Laurey to keep me from doing it. You were watching."

She dropped her hands from her face.

"Harve—it's different now—all of it. I see straight. I'll help clean up the place—I—I'll do what you want—I—I'll be pretty again— Oh, Lord—dear Lord—I thank you!"

"Muther," the eager voice and vibrant face were back. "Muther, the boat's all right. Kin I row him over, muther? He's hurt in the shoulder. A woman told him there wan't no trains. Wasn't that a fearful thing for her to do, muther? Kin I row him over?"

Her mother looked down at her—no question about the love that Compton then saw. But she swept the child behind her with one hand.

Harve Matthews caught the little flung figure and encircled it with one arm.

"Come here, sister," he said gravely. "You row him over, Laura. Thirty-five cents, mister."

XI

COMPTON'S eyes blurred with pain as he followed the woman down the steep path to the river. Every loose stone was under his feet, every projecting root was in his way. She walked stiffly ahead.

She had left her sunbonnet behind, and a great coil of grayish hair was loosening from its pins. It was not all gray; as the sun caught it, there was still that overlay like shining brass that used to lie in other sun rays.

It was agony to go through the sand. She pushed the boat into the water, and he climbed in; she took the oars and shoved off.

The current was slow; reedy things caught her stroke. She took her time, and her gaze never left his face. He could not look away—how big her eyes were, and green and foreboding, and narrowed at the corners.

He did not dare to speak, but he wildly hoped she would, and then he could ask about little Laurey—how he could see the child again. He would ask. He would plead.

He must—for through his pain a great loneliness and a longing beat and scorched. These were new things—come to stay.

He had not believed in the pull of paternity, but that must be what had brought

him here; that was why his still house fretted him in the city; now he knew why he had watched fathers in the parks. Laura would speak, and give him a chance.

She stared at him, and did not look ahead for the landing, but ran the boat into the bank with a jar that sickened him.

He climbed slowly out, and she waited. He felt in a pocket, and hesitated. Then he counted out thirty-five cents in small coins. She took them, and dropped them into her apron pocket.

Wouldn't she speak? Was this the end of the little girl who would forever haunt

him; of the firm, small shoulder, and the confident voice that had said: "Lean hard. I'm strong—"

Beyond the bank the railroad station peaked. He heard the splash of her oars.

"Laura!" he called out, desperately. "Let me talk to you! Let me send some one—"

She rowed steadily on—gone without a word.

And he was alone with his bitter memories—and this new pain.

Always, forever, he would miss the child he had seen that day.

Henry Takes a Vacation

CALIFORNIANS WILL NOT BE SURPRISED AT THE MIRACLE IN
THIS STORY; THEY KNOW THEIR WELL-KNOWN
CLIMATE CAN DO ALMOST ANYTHING

By Albert William Stone

HE was thirty-nine years old, and looked five years older. His name was Henry Soden. If the name savors of small towns and mediocre attainments, so did Henry—to look at.

To be more specific, he was one of these types you meet several times a day, if you are not an absolute hermit—medium of height, a trifle thickset; moderately thin hair of dullish brown streaked with gray, and so on. His face was rather full and habitually clean shaven. Quiet brown eyes under rather heavy brows, indifferently fitting clothes of indeterminate color, and a habit of wearing brown silk socks the year round—there you have a reasonably accurate picture of Henry.

He would have made a distinctly unromantic figure as an Orlando in Charlemagne's court, you would say. His Angelica, had he possessed one, would probably have felt herself cheated. For Henry was just a disillusioned grass widower of such long standing that folks had for years referred to him as a "bachelor." You know what that means.

Nevertheless, judging by the standard of

material achievement, Henry Soden was not exactly an ordinary individual; for he was the owner of a thriving furniture manufacturing business in Topeka, Kansas, and a valued stockholder in one of that city's biggest and most important banks. At a board of directors' meeting he was a controlling influence.

And he could write his check for—but why go into such unromantic details? Strange as it may seem, this is a love story, and the number of ciphers Henry could legitimately employ in casting up his fortune has, really, little to do with the matter.

"Soden has two main objects in life," the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce once told an interested visitor. "One is his devotion to business. The other is his attitude toward women."

"I see," said the visitor understandingly. "Woman hater, eh?"

"Why, not exactly that. He's polite enough to 'em. But he just leaves 'em alone; see? I wouldn't say he hates women—unless it's blondes. He's sure got a prejudice against those babies."

And then the secretary related the story

of Henry's brief matrimonial experience; how he had fallen in love with a yellow-haired actress who came to Topeka with a burlesque troupe that became stranded, and married her on short notice.

"Henry was only twenty-one years old at the time. She stuck with him four months before she beat it with a hardware salesman, without even writing Henry a good-by note. He didn't seem to worry a whole lot, though, because in that four months he'd gone through more hell than Dante ever even dreamed of. He found out, in other words, just how good for nothing a woman can be, once she makes up her mind. So he got a divorce on the grounds of desertion; and from then on he's had about as much use for blondes as a Fiji Islander has for a membership in the University Club. He was *through*."

For eighteen years, then, Henry had buckled down to hard work and no play, which is bad for anybody. With his business in excellent shape, and a comfortable surplus in the bank, the time came when the siren call of Southern California proved too much for him.

So he signed a bale or so of checks, packed a couple of trunks, and boarded the Limited for the land of distant delight, vaguely promising himself a month or so of play—Henry Soden, who had forgotten what play means, if, indeed, he had ever learned!

II

It was in a blazing Los Angeles restaurant that he met Dorothy James. Let's have no illusions about Dorothy. She was pretty in a retroussé sort of way, with the assurance that goes with a turned-up nose, silk stockings of cirrus cloud effect, and a way of wearing her clothes that made them look new.

Henry had gone to the restaurant purely by chance. Dorothy sat at an adjoining table, and devoured fruit salad, cucumbers with tomatoes, cheese sticks, orange ice cream, and hot chocolate. This selection was a woman's idea of food; and Henry, knowing little of the ways of the sex, stared with astonishment at her gastronomic performance.

I said we would have no illusions about Dorothy. When she caught Henry gazing at her provender, she dimpled with the ready ease of the expert. Whereupon Henry's eyes dropped back to his plate,

and Henry's face was instantly suffused with a flush.

The surge of red over his rather commonplace countenance at once invested it with what any woman under sixty-five would have denominated as "charm." Ten years dropped from him magically.

Dorothy, you may be sure, did not miss the blush as she shot him a sidewise glance through her curved and incredibly long lashes. Her eyes were exceedingly large and very, very blue.

"A gold digger," said the worldly-wise Henry to himself, uncomfortably. "And a blonde." He had discerned the yellow curls that peeped from the edge of her natty turban, which fitted her small head so closely that only a scant inch of her creamy neck was visible from behind. For him she was branded. He renewed his attack on his porterhouse and fried potatoes with vigor. "She don't need to try her wiles on me."

A waiter was bearing down upon him with a dessert of solid-looking pudding stuff, with wine sauce spilling alluringly over the edges. Like most bachelors—please recollect that Henry was a bachelor to all intents and purposes—he was a hearty eater. For eighteen years he had resisted the opposite sex successfully, and he didn't propose to have his first vacation in that time spoiled now. He emptied his first cup of coffee and ordered another.

And then he was suddenly aware that something akin to an altercation was taking place at the adjacent table. The head waiter was standing there, talking patiently. Apparently his speech had to do with Dorothy's check.

"I'm sorry, lady," he was saying. "But the rules—"

"But I tell you I don't *want* to see the manager!" Dorothy wailed. Her voice seemed perilously close to tears. "It's only a dollar and ten cents, isn't it? I'll bring in the money to-morrow."

"I guess it'll be all right with the manager, lady," the head waiter soothed. Impatience was showing under his thin veneer of politeness. "But I guess you'll have to see him. It's the rules, you see."

Beauty in distress! Has it ever failed to appeal to the chivalrous instincts of man? Probably Henry would have viewed with perfect equanimity a similar predicament involving one of his own case-hardened sex. He might even have approved

of forcible ejection of the culprit. But a woman! And all over a mere matter of a dollar and ten cents.

Henry pushed back his chair and started to thrust his hand into his right trouser pocket. Then he paused. Some slumbering instinct, so deep-seated that he couldn't have analyzed it had he tried, stayed him in this action.

Instead of withdrawing the hand with money in it, he arose and stepped over to the other table, assuming an expression of pleased surprise. Oh, Henry!

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, throwing a note of heartiness into his voice that would have astonished his associates back in Topeka. "If it isn't—er—Miss Smith! How do you do?"

He held out his hand. Dorothy accepted it with suspicious alacrity, smiling angelically up to him.

"If it isn't Mr.—er—Hamilton!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Hamilton, you don't know—"

The head waiter, suddenly his usual obsequious self, hastened to draw out a chair for Henry, who dropped into it. The subordinate waiter followed his chief to a point a discreet distance away.

Henry found himself staring into the biggest, bluest, most heavily fringed eyes he had ever seen. He thrilled to the optical contact, and endeavored to cover up his agitation by inserting one forefinger in his waistcoat pocket, after the manner of a judicious business man about to indulge in some high-sounding small talk.

"Didn't know you until I heard your voice, just now," he boomed loudly. "Couldn't forget that, of course," chuckling. "Ha, ha!" He leaned back and smiled at her. She smiled back. "Now that I've found you," he added, "you must let me pay for your dinner."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!"

It was the conventional protest, to be sure. Henry had no doubt whatever but that she would let him pay without carrying the protest very far, and he was right. But he might as well set her straight right at the outset. No use raising her hopes. He'd be decent about it, of course. Just as any gentleman would be.

"Listen," he said in a lower tone, leaning across the cloth. "My name's Soden, from Topeka, Kansas. Out here on a vacation. We'll just sit here and talk a few minutes; then we'll go out, and I'll—er—

pay your check. Then we can both go about our business."

III

It was a bluff statement, from a bluff business man—or so Henry flattered himself. Dorothy looked at him guilelessly, and flashed her even white teeth in a paralyzing smile.

"Just as you say, Mr. Hamilton," she said cooly. "I'm sure—"

She followed him to the cashier's cage, where he paid the checks from a plethoric roll of bills he had pulled from his pocket. A lean, sharp-visaged young man with hard gray eyes, puttees, and a cane was just coming in. He paused at sight of the girl, and eyed the plethoric roll of this prosperous looking stranger.

"Hello, Dorothy," he greeted. "Land—ed anything yet?"

"Not yet," she replied. Henry raked in his change and turned around. He disliked the young man in puttees at sight.

"Well, I may be able to do something for you pretty soon." The young man winked one of his hard, gray eyes. "Give you a ring to-night, maybe—or to-morrow. So long."

He winked again and sauntered down the room, his cane hanging jauntily on one arm. Henry stared after him.

"Friend of yours?" he demanded.

"Just—an acquaintance," Dorothy told him.

"Too bad he didn't come in sooner. He—might have helped you out."

It wasn't a very diplomatic statement; but, then, Henry was not exactly in a diplomatic mood. Besides, the hard-eyed wink of the young man in puttees had nettled him. But Dorothy did not take offense at the remark.

"I'm glad he didn't," she said, placing one small hand upon Henry's arm. "He's disagreeable, sometimes. And I'm sure *you* never are, Mr.—er—Hamilton."

"Soden," he corrected gruffly. They emerged into the brilliantly lighted street, and paused at the edge of the crowd that milled endlessly past. Towering skyscrapers, many of their windows illumined, rose on both sides of the street. Motor cars sounded their sirens insistently; trolley cars clanged brazenly as they crept along. A traffic policeman's whistle blew at the corner.

Henry knew that the thing for him to do

was to take polite leave and go about his business. Nevertheless, he lingered. The touch of the girl's hand on his arm was not at all displeasing. He glanced at his watch; it was nearly eight o'clock. Dorothy was good to look at, and obviously was out of funds. A gentleman could scarcely do less than see her home, at least.

"But it's so early," she demurred, when he made the proposal. "Not eight o'clock yet." She said it coyly, but with just the right amount of hesitancy. We are to have no illusions about Dorothy, remember. She accompanied her protest with a slight pressure on Henry's arm. It was not unpleasant, even to a business man who has eschewed the society of women for eighteen years.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked abruptly.

"Wherever *you* would like to go," she countered, giving him a dazzling smile.

"All right; name the show. I haven't anything else to do this evening, anyhow."

He said it rather defiantly. She would understand that there would be no nonsense about it. Hang it all, wasn't he on a vacation? Nobody out here knew him, anyhow. He'd take her to a show, and afterward he'd take her home, maybe. Then he'd go to his hotel, and that would end the matter—*sine die!*

The theater she had in mind, it developed, was two blocks away. They went along with the throng, at this hour incredibly dense. Henry shouldered his way through it with the accomplished ease of the born cosmopolite—from Topeka, Kansas. Dorothy clung to his arm, also with accomplished ease.

Suddenly Henry felt his other arm seized from behind.

"Hello, Henry!"

He turned, startled. It was a business acquaintance from Topeka, grinning. Henry returned the grin; he hoped the acquaintance would not discern the painful effort it was costing him.

"Hello, John."

"I see you're busy," John stated, with no abatement of the grin that twisted his gray mustache upward. "Hope I'll run across you again."

And he disappeared in the crowd. Henry drew a long breath. Dorothy looked up at him.

"Everybody comes to Los Angeles, don't they?" she remarked naively.

"It sure looks that way," grunted Henry, as he resumed his forward progress.

IV

A TAXICAB disgorged them shortly after midnight at the garish entrance of a hotel in Hollywood, the address Dorothy had given the driver. Despite the lateness of the hour, the lobby was thronged with a gayly dressed crowd. Considerably to Henry's surprise, the girl did not invite him in.

"I've had a perfectly lovely time," she told him. "And I'm ever so grateful to you for coming to my rescue in the restaurant. It was so careless of me to leave my purse at home." She hesitated. "Won't you let me pay you back?"

"Of course not," said Henry promptly—as promptly as though he hadn't known she hadn't the slightest intention of doing so. "So this is where you live?"

She nodded. "And when am I going to see you again?" she asked.

Now, all evening Henry had been assuring himself that this would be the last of it. He would be no *Rogero* to Dorothy's *Alcina*; not he. Others might permit themselves to be lulled into a fool's paradise if they chose, but not the man who had learned to know women—especially blondes—to his lasting sorrow, as Henry had.

He had enjoyed the evening, to be sure; what red-blooded man would not, with a beautiful and reasonably vivacious companion to help him? She had nestled confidently at his side in the theater; at the supper afterward she had decorated the brilliant cabaret with her alluring presence; and in the taxicab, rolling toward Hollywood, her soft breathing and subtle fragrance had come dangerously near to intoxicating him. Nevertheless, he had repeatedly asserted within himself that there would be no more of it, after to-night. He was firm about this.

And now, with his mind fully and irrevocably made up, he looked into the girl's radium-blue eyes, the curved lashes fringing them like golden foliage, and straightway temporized with fate.

"How about to-morrow?" he asked.

"Where are you stopping?"

He gave her the name of his hotel, with something perilously like a feeling of guilt tugging at his consciousness. She considered, one dainty slipper tracing a design on the sidewalk.

"I may call you up," she decided suddenly. "Good night!"

She flung him a smile over her shoulder as she tripped up the steps and through the swinging doors into the lobby. Henry stood where he was a full minute after the crowd within had swallowed her. Then, turning to the driver, he surprised a cynical expression upon that worthy's sharp countenance. The discovery nettled him.

"Drive to the Ambassador," he ordered crisply, entering the cab.

On the way to his hotel he had time to think soberly. The girl was patently one of the army with which Southern California—sunny, exotic, golden-dreamed California—was overrun. She worshiped at the shrine of pleasure.

Such girls, he reflected, were characteristically insincere and unscrupulous. Doubtless she had spotted him for a stranger in the city, and guessed from his appearance that he was alone. She was looking for a good time.

"And what of it?" he asked his reflection in the mirror of his hotel room. His eyes were alight with a fire that had not burned in them for eighteen years. "A good time seems to be the principal aim of everybody out here. It's what I came for myself."

He had difficulty in getting to sleep. Visions of radium-blue eyes, fringed with curved lashes of incredible length, kept rising before him. That confounded chap from Topeka would carry back with him an account of Henry's fall from grace. It would furnish food for hilarious conversation behind his back. Perhaps some of his associates would even presume to joke with him about it. What could he tell them?

"Tell 'em it's my niece, or something," he muttered unhappily. He was feeling seriously disturbed as the night wore on. "What in the world did I ever come out here for, anyhow?"

He twisted and turned on his pillow, and finally fell into troubled sleep. If golden-fringed eyes of blue invaded his dreams, they were only dreams, after all—were they not?

He awoke at eight o'clock, scarcely refreshed. A cold shower revived him somewhat. The yellow sunlight was flooding his room, however, and by the time he had shaved and dressed he felt better. After all, last night was last night.

Henry was himself again. He descended

to the breakfast room and ate a hearty breakfast. Afterward he strolled into the lobby and helped himself to a leather armchair, from where he watched the endless Los Angeles crowd milling past the plate glass windows.

"Call for Mr. Soden!"

It was the strident voice of a uniformed bell boy calling. Henry sprang to his feet, and was informed that a telephone summons awaited him in one of the booths. At the sudden acceleration of the beating of his heart he cursed under his breath; and Henry was not a profane man! A musical feminine voice caressed his eardrums.

"I said I might give you a call," she reminded him demurely. "Are you angry?"

"Of course not." There was a fervency in Henry's tone that carried conviction. Whereat she laughed; for what woman of Dorothy's stamp does not know when she has made a conquest?

"I'm coming downtown pretty soon," she said. "If you're real good, I *might* let you take me to lunch."

Lunch with Dorothy! Henry Soden, thirty-nine years and looking five years—well, we might as well admit it; he was looking all of five years *younger* this morning—drew a long breath. After all, why not? He had nothing at all to do; and that confounded chap from Topeka could hardly run across him twice in two days.

"Where?" he asked huskily.

She named a popular café, and told him its location. He hung up in a daze, and for the next hour and a half occupied himself in making the most careful toilet he had essayed in years. He brushed his thinning hair so emphatically that it actually shone. When he entered the café, shortly before twelve o'clock, he was the image of a spruce business man on a holiday; and he didn't look a day over thirty-two.

V

DOROTHY, experienced young woman that she was, was ten minutes late. She looked much as she had the night before, allowing for the enchantment of pulchritude always to be extracted from artificial lighting effects. She wore the same little turban and fetching blue tailored suit. The latter, to the critical eye of another woman, would have been revealed as past the first sheen of newness, and a trifle threadbare at seams and elbows; but to Henry's masculine eye it was merely a perfect sar-

torial embellishment for a highly presentable girl. He drank her in.

"My, but you look nice!" she told him, her eyes ranging admiringly over his form. "Even nicer than you did last night," she added.

And Henry thrilled to the compliment. He had not thought much about his personal appearance in many years. Now he was aware that he wanted to look very well, indeed—and all for little Dorothy James, about whom we must have no illusions.

His enjoyment of the luncheon was marred, somewhat, by the unheralded appearance, at another table, of the lean young man in puttees. He noted, now, that he wore Valentino sideburns; and Henry felt an almost irresistible impulse to kick him. The young man spotted them before he had even looked at his bill of fare, and nodded brazenly. Dorothy nodded back.

"Your friend again, I see," Henry remarked. He tried to make his tone casual, but for the life of him he couldn't keep a note of sarcasm out of it. He recalled the young man's remark about giving Dorothy a ring. "I—suppose he called you, last night?"

"Gracious, no!" she exclaimed, laughing. "It was too late, wasn't it?"

"This morning, then?"

She swept him with her gay eyes. "Oh, please let's not intrude business on this lunch," she begged, without answering his query. "Let's see. Fruit salad—"

She ordered one of the queer woman lunches such as he had seen her eating the day before. Henry fought down an emotion that he recognized, angrily, as resentment, and scanned his own menu.

Confound the fellow, anyhow! Couldn't a respectable man have luncheon with a lady without being eyed by a putteed whippersnapper with a silly cane?

The cynical expression on the youth's countenance did not add to Henry's placidity. He could feel his gorge rising in exact proportion to the other's continued interest in himself and the girl.

Presently, however, he lost his resentment in the pleasure of watching Dorothy eat. Some women have unpleasing mannerisms at the table, to be sure; but not Dorothy. She exhibited countless little graces in the handling of knife and fork, and even in the plebeian task of using the salt shaker. He noted that her slim fingers were tipped with very pink, brilliantly

manicured nails. She wore no rings or bracelets whatever.

She talked vivaciously, and laughed a great deal; yet there were times when Henry surprised what he might have interpreted as a retrospective, far-away expression in her blue eyes. The putteed youth finally finished his own lunch and departed, not without one of his hard-eyed winks at Dorothy as he passed. Henry swallowed hard.

"What makes that fellow wink at you all the time?" he asked.

She smiled at him.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Unless it's just his way of doing."

"Well, it's a poor way, if you ask me. He may be a friend of yours, but—"

The smile was gone suddenly from her face.

"Please don't," she commanded. Then: "Let's talk of something else."

She had little to say about herself, after all; yet the impression she gave him was that she wanted him to know she came from a wealthy family in the East, and that she was in California for the purpose of entering "the pictures." He gathered that she had forsaken a society career for one in the movies.

She was on the eve of signing a contract as a star, she told him. Wouldn't he be gratified to see her in a great feature film, and to be able to nudge his seat neighbor and whisper: "I knew that young lady in California?"

He accepted her statements with the traditional grain of salt. She was pretty, but not the type he had seen in the pictures. Los Angeles and Hollywood were jammed with young women who probably came to California for photoplay careers, and who either went back where they came from or else remained to watch their more successful sisters from the sidelines. He was not impressed with her as a potential actress, nor as a debutante of the past.

In the afternoon Henry hired an automobile, and together they whirled along the boulevards of the open country. He saw long lines of orange and lemon trees through a sort of roseate haze, with Dorothy nestling by his side and exclaiming from time to time at what she saw.

As if she had not exclaimed countless times before at the same things, but with other men! They took dinner together and went to the initial showing of a picture

afterward, with Dorothy pointing out various artists on the film and calmly advancing the information that she knew them intimately and they liked her.

Henry caught himself patting her arm in the partial darkness, and chuckling to himself. She was clearly an accomplished prevaricator, making almost pitiful efforts to impress him with her importance in the scheme of things.

"She's not bad company, anyhow," he told himself doggedly. "And after this evening I'm through."

VI

BUT he wasn't. The lure of her companionship grew with the days—and the weeks. The month he had promised himself came to an end, and receded into the past. The second one was well on its way. Perhaps *Rogero* recognized his own gullibility, as he lazed in the palace of *Alcina*, for what it was; but declined to awake because of the mental effort involved. It was the same with Henry Soden. He was eating the lotus with a vengeance, and worrying little about it.

"To-night ends it," he declared so repeatedly that it grew monotonous. "I'll start back for Topeka to-morrow."

But the next day he found himself putting it off for another twenty-four hours. California's fall was merging imperceptibly into a new kind of a winter for Henry. He saw the snow whitening the tops of the mountain ranges back of the city, and read in the exultant Los Angeles newspapers that "back East" they were having blizzards and zero weather.

It all seemed like a dream. The blue waters of the placid Pacific continued to roll their surf against the beach sands, and occasionally the papers professed a mild fear of damaging frost. That was all.

Dorothy was always at Henry's call. They motored through long stretches of Southern California together; they ate at most of the most famous restaurants; they visited every theater and picture house of importance, and viewed the historic spots.

Henry spent considerable money, to be sure. But that made no appreciable difference in his bank account, since the manufacturing business in Topeka was a thriving, well-established source of income.

And all this time Henry assured himself that, like the confirmed tobacco user, he "could quit when he wanted to." And one

night, after watching her trip across the veranda of the garish hotel in Hollywood, he came to a sudden resolve.

He had been under no illusions as to her representations regarding the hotel; he knew that she did not live there, any more than he did. He would discover for himself just where she did live—to-night—now. The truth wouldn't hurt him.

He told the taxicab driver to wait, and walked around the corner of the hotel on a side street, bringing himself to anchor a short distance from a certain side entrance he had discovered. There was no light over the entrance.

"I'll find out for sure," he explained to himself. "Then I'll say good-by and go back home, where I belong. I just want to show her that I'm not such a fool as she takes me to be."

Oh, Henry!

"Just a little grafter," he mused, as he waited. "Not an honest bone in her body. Lives for a good time, and don't give a rap who pays for it—so long as *she* doesn't have to. I just want to show her up; that's all. Then I'll be off for home."

It was a fine night, with a high moon, almost full, riding across the star-flecked canopy of a blue-black sky. When Dorothy emerged from the side door, after a discreet interval, and clicked her small heels smartly on the concrete sidewalk as she tripped down the street, Henry's rubber heels made no sound.

In a few minutes they were in the neighborhood of quiet bungalows, with soft lights occasionally sending out subdued rays through silken draperies. Here and there a belated porch light gleamed dimly.

But Dorothy did not stop at any of the bungalows. Instead, she continued until she had passed into a region of less pretentious houses—older structures, from which no lights at all came. Old-fashioned fences fronted the abbreviated yards, discernible faintly in the rays of the moon. Arc lights sizzled at the street intersections, and rows of superb pepper trees, queerly out of place in this nondescript district, lined the curbs.

"Poor kid!" Henry found himself muttering. "She must be up against it for sure." And for the first time he remembered things he had noticed only with abstraction before—signs of home-cleaned gloves, darns in the silk ankles of her stockings, threadbare seams in her tailored suit.

She had worn the same hat all the time, he now recalled. No wonder—

VII

HE decided, abruptly, that he was nothing less than a cad for following her in this fashion, and paused in his rubber-heeled stride. Dorothy was almost to the next intersection.

While he stood uncertainly, divided between a determination to return and the conviction that the girl should have an escort, he saw a man step out of the shade of one of the pepper trees and confront her. The rays of the arc light were reflected on his shining puttees; Henry could even see the cane hung over one arm.

He went close enough to hear every word. From the shade of a tree that sheltered him, he saw the girl hesitate and stop.

"Well?" she said.

"I've been waiting for you," the man growled. "I suppose you've ditched the old guy for the night, haven't you?"

Henry clenched his fists. The old guy, eh? The young rat!

"I haven't ditched any one," she was saying, her voice trembling slightly. "And please go away and leave me alone."

"Sure," the man sneered. "I'll leave you alone—oh, yes! You've left *me* alone for some time, all right. But I've had enough; see? You're going to treat me right, now, or—"

"What do you mean?"

"You know darned well what I mean!" he snarled, his voice growing louder in his palpable anger. "You had a good time stringing me along while you were at it, didn't you? You, with your stories about a rich father, and your New York society! I ought to have known you for what you are—a plain little liar—"

Henry's muscles were all tensed for a dash forward; but he held himself in check. After all, wasn't the putteed youth's indictment the same as his own? He would wait awhile.

"I haven't strung you along any more than you have me," she retorted with spirit. "You have lied to me from beginning to end, and you know it." There was a sob in her voice now. "You never had any intention of giving me a chance in the pictures. I can see it all plainly now. I was just another little fool!"

He laughed. The street, save for the pair and their unsuspected listener, was de-

serted. Their voices carried with startling clarity.

"Sure, you were," he said coolly. "You'd never make a picture actress in a thousand years. You haven't got a film face, in the first place. As a star you'd last about five minutes. Do you think I'm as big a fool as you are?"

"Then why did you tell me I had a chance?"

"Because that seemed the easiest way to get by with you," he said brutally. He shifted his cane to his left hand.

"I know your kind," he assured her. "California's full of you. Come here almost broke, having spent all your coin for clothes. Think the directors are going to fall over one another to get you in their pictures. Then it's either get a job, or—do what you're doing with the old guy."

Henry swore gently to himself.

"And you can't get a job, because there are no jobs to be had," the putteed man concluded.

VIII

THERE was a short silence. Then the girl stepped in front of the man and deliberately slapped him in the face. He staggered back, and exploded in a blistering oath.

"You shan't talk that way about—him, anyway," she said softly. Henry thrilled at her defense of him. "He's one of the finest men I ever knew. And don't think for a minute that I'm trying to—marry him, as you insinuate, even if he asked me. Because I—I won't! He's too good for me—that's the real reason."

"That so?" countered the other. "What's the matter with you, then? Gone bad, sure enough?"

"No, thank God, I haven't!" she exclaimed. "You know I haven't, too. Maybe I have lied to you—and to him, for that matter. I told you I had rich folks back East. Well, I haven't. I haven't any folks; if you want to know it. I ran away from an orphan asylum—"

"Go ahead," invited the man with the puttees, caressing his cheek. "Tell the whole story of your life."

"And I was fool enough to work until I had saved enough money to buy some pretty clothes and a ticket to Los Angeles," she concluded bitterly. "If I *was* a little fool, I've learned better. I'd take any honest work I could get, now, but you know

perfectly well there isn't any work for girls out here. And I'd go away—if I had the money—"

The putteed man stepped forward and grasped her by the arm.

"That's where I come in," he said. "You treat me right, and I'll buy a ticket to wherever you say; see? Come on, now."

He was in the act of attempting to drag her along when something struck him with stunning force on the side of his head. His cane went spinning in one direction, his hat in another, and he, himself, brought up against the trunk of the pepper tree, gasping. Henry Soden, his eyes blazing in the half light, confronted him.

"I didn't like you the first time I saw you," Henry told him through his teeth. "I like you less now. Get out of here before I kill you!"

Muttering, the putteed man departed without stopping to pick up his hat and cane. Henry turned to Dorothy James, who had shrunk up against the fence, aghast at this sudden turn of events.

"Will you marry me?" he demanded belligerently.

"You—you heard?" she asked, stammering and trembling.

"Every word," he replied grimly. "You've lied to me from start to finish, but I love you. I just found it out. Will you marry me?"

"But you—you don't know me!"

She was suddenly in his arms, and crying. Henry turned her face up in the arc light, and saw the tears running down her cheeks.

"What are you crying about?" he exclaimed, trembling a bit himself.

"Because—I—love you," she sniffed, her face buried in his coat. "And you'll never—never believe it." Now she was sobbing. "I've lied to you something terrible—about everything—"

"You never fooled me any," he consoled

her, both by words and gesture. "But I came pretty near fooling myself."

"How?" She looked at him through her tears.

"By going back to Topeka without marrying you," he replied. "I'd never have got over it. Thought I knew all about women—just because I was married to one once." He looked at her tenderly. "It's that hair of yours," he explained. "My wife was a blonde, and I've always had the idea that blondes aren't to be trusted."

IX

SHE returned his gaze with startled eyes. Then, with a quick flirt of her hand, she jerked the turban from her head. Her hair shone pale in the rays of the arc light.

"If it was lighter," she said in a strange voice, "you'd see a different color at the roots of it. I'm—I'm not a blonde, Henry. It's just dyed. I thought I'd have a better chance of getting into the pictures with yellow hair, you see."

"Then," said Henry hoarsely, "you even lied about your hair?"

She nodded.

"It's red," she said simply.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Henry.

They were married the next day; and when they returned to Topeka in the spring—for they spent their honeymoon in California—Henry proudly introduced his tition-haired bride to everybody. His friend John, the one who had recognized him in Los Angeles, bowed gallantly as he acknowledged the presentation.

"I would have taken her for the same lady I saw you with out there, Henry," he said mischievously, "only I had the impression *her* hair was yellow."

"It was," said Henry, enigmatically. "But we spent the winter in California, you know—and that California sun performs some queer tricks, sometimes."

Oh, Henry!

BEWITCHED

I AM the moon's lover and the sun's;

I love the hills and valleys;

I love the brook that runs

Leaping and laughing down to the sea;

But the sun striking fire from your hair

And with that in your eyes that is there,

Like the moon in deep pools—

God of me!

F. L. Montgomery

There You Are—*Voilà!*

THIS CHARMING AND INGENIOUS TALE WILL MAKE WIVES AND HUSBANDS EXCLAIM: "SO *THIS* IS PARIS!"—AND THEIR VIEWPOINTS WILL BE POLES APART

By Reita Lambert

DAD called it his sabbatical year. The idea was not original, but sired by the Rev. Dr. Dale, on the morning of the announcement in the *Courier*. That announcement had headed the Social Items column:

Mr. and Mrs. William Keene, accompanied by Miss Doris and William, Jr., are sailing for Europe on the eighteenth of this month.

Dad ran into Dr. Dale on his way to the store that morning. The minister stopped and held out his hand.

"See by the *Courier* you're going to Europe," he had said genially. "Taking a sabbatical year, eh?"

"May not be gone as long as that," dad told him, but during those crowded weeks between the announcement and the choky moment when New York's serrated skyline drew away from the big steamer, the whimsy became dad's by right of adoption and faithful use.

"Yes," he would say to customers and friends—mostly they were one and the same thing—"I'm taking a sabbatical year, as you might say."

Mrs. Keene appropriated it, too, though she always gave dad credit. The expression savored of the erudite repartee expected of a world traveler: "Taking a sabbatical year, as Mr. Keene says."

It was the Keenes' first trip abroad. There are people who embark on a European trip with the extemporaneous ease most of us display in buying a glass of soda.

"My dear," telephones Mrs. Blessington to her friend, Mrs. Van Deusen, "I'm thinking of running over to Paris on the eighteenth. Do come along!" Or, Mr. Henry Rockenbilt, looking up from his

London *Sketch* just arrived in the last post, says to his wife: "By jove! That Borwick collection's going to be auctioned off on the eighteenth. Guess I'll hop over to England."

But these are in the minority. The Keenes are numbered among the majority. That casual announcement in the *Courier* was the offspring of years of hope, months of planning, towers of pamphlets with palatial steamers and elegant ladies on the covers; endless evenings of breathless debate at home.

Few American's of dad's type achieve Europe on the impetus of their own predilections. If, however, their coercion has been properly effected, they embark with the inflexible conviction that they alone conceived the idea and nurtured it to full fruition.

So with dad—ordinarily no plagiarist—on the morning before they left Hartsdale for New York: dad in new tweeds and smelling of new leather—olfactory evidence of a new pigskin wallet in his pocket—delivering a final homily to his assistant the while he selected two brand new pocket kodaks from his stock for Miss Doris and Master William, Jr.

"Just make a note of these, Miss Lawson—two pocket autographics." And to a customer. "Yes, to-morrow we sail. First vacation I've taken in twenty years, I guess. Thought I owed it to the children—nothing like travel to broaden a youngster's mind. Want those rolls developed? Well, Miss Lawson will take care of you all right. She knows as much about the business as I do—one print of each good negative, Miss Lawson."

This mood held and lapped over to the

moment when the steamer began to shudder away from its dock, and the friendly faces along the pier became a blurred ribbon of moving color, an indistinct medley of sound. It is a trying moment, that, for the unseasoned traveler.

There is such a deadly finality about it. Although the pier may not be twenty feet distant, the harbor alive with friendly craft, you may as well be in mid ocean for all the escape these afford. With the hauling in of the last gangplank, the splash of the last hawser, your doom is as inevitable as a death sentence.

It was when the pier was swinging across the stern of the boat that dad was attacked by an overpowering impulse to vault the rail and make a flying leap for that vanishing haven. He stood there, white, shaking, bewildered.

His hands clutched the deck rail. He was like a man roused from an anæsthetic trance in the midst of the operation. Horror prickled him all over with icy drops of sweat.

What was he doing here? What in Sam Hill was he thinking of—running off like this? To Europe, of all places!

Leaving the store, too! Why, the business would go to rack and ruin—the business he had spent thirty years in building up from nothing.

Europe! Why should he go gallivanting off to Europe? And then the sponge was mercifully readministered. A pleasant voice was saying:

"Your dinner coat's in the steamer wardrobe trunk, dear, and they put it under the berth. You'll have to get it out in time to dress for dinner."

"You said I could wear my new yellow, mother!"

"Dad! Look! They've got games upstairs—deck tennis and—"

"Oh, Bill, see how funny the Statue of Liberty looks from here!"

"She'll look pretty good, girly, when you come sailing home. Isn't that so?"

Dad turned to find a man at his elbow—a pink-faced man already in his steamer cap, already harnessed into his binoculars. "She always looks good to me," he told dad, "and this is my fourteenth trip. Have to go. I'm an importer. Of lace. Suppose you're going for pleasure."

"Y-yes," said dad, "taking my family across on a little vacation. First time I've left my business in twenty years." And he

added, mechanically: "Thought it was about time to take a sabbatical year, so to speak."

II

HE was still saying it at the *pension* in Paris nearly three months later—although more rarely now. Behind him lay eleven weeks of moldy churches and crumbling palaces; of noble ruins and decaying grandeurs; of Colosseums and Rialtos, illustrious canvases and marbles; of gondolas and sight-seeing busses and insecure little lopsided trains and drafty hotels and *châteaux* and swarthy faces and strange tongues.

All these things were behind him, not like stately milestones along the clear, white highway of memory—lovely, unforgettable; but like so much jumbled débris through which he had struggled.

Patiently he had Baedekered his little herd through Italy and France; tirelessly echoed their stupendous adjectives; gladly stripped and restripped the new pigskin wallet of lire and francs. It was in Paris his family recognized the unmistakable signs of incipient mutiny.

There was a certain reassurance for dad in Paris. The *pension* for one thing. It was conducted by an Englishwoman, and three-fourths of her guests were either English or American. There was reassurance in the sound of his own language, and in the fact that he might, for the asking, have his vegetables with his meat. Tremendously important, that, to a middle-aged American after eleven weeks on the Continent.

All these things lent dad courage on a certain evening when his wife was mapping out their itinerary for the following day.

"I think we ought to go out to Malmaison, to-morrow," she said.

"What a funny name for a place! Why, that means sick house," Doris translated primly.

Dad glanced a little fearfully across at his daughter. How this trip had changed the little rascal—matured her. Why, she had the poise of a young woman instead of a sixteen-year-old—even her looks. She looked smart—and foreign—in that trim little French dress, and with her hair slicked back like that.

"Huh! Think you're smart," scoffed Bill. "Anybody could translate that." And he proceeded to prove it. "*Mal*—sick. *Maison*—house."

But "anybody" couldn't. Dad couldn't. Bill himself couldn't have done it eleven weeks before. But *he* had learned.

It had been the same in Italy. Why, the children had known before dad how many lire there were in a dollar, and how to say "thank you" and "please"—things like that in Italian. Even Flora had known.

"Miss Sudry says we can go right on from Malmaison to St. Germain," Flora was saying now. "Both places are on the same tram line. We can have *déjeuner* along the way somewhere."

Déjeuner! Tram! This time dad looked at his wife. *He* would have said "luncheon" and "trolley." If the kids had lapped it up like sponges, what of his wife? And to look at her you'd think she had lived abroad for three years instead of three months.

"What's at Malmaison, mother?"

"Josephine's *château*, dear. You remember, Napoleon's wife."

"Oh, yes," Doris remembered; "the one he divorced."

"What 'd he divorce her for?" Bill wanted to know.

"Because she couldn't bear him a son," Doris explained with condescension.

"*Doris!*"

"Well, it's history, mother," Doris defended herself.

"That's enough of that kind of history from you," dad decided. But he spoke mechanically. Only half of him had listened to that conversation. The other half was still floundering through a spiky morass of interrogation points.

Three months! And they had lapped it up, while he—but they were young. They hadn't jelled yet. Still, that couldn't be it. Flora was almost as old as he was, yet she had adapted herself as nimbly as the children had done.

"We can have tea at St. Germain," she announced, "and get back in ample time for dinner."

"You can count me out," said dad abruptly and unexpectedly.

"What!"

"Why, dad, don't you—" Doris began.

"No, I don't," dad cut her short. "You go along with the children, Flo. You know your way about. I'm tired—I'll stick around here to-morrow."

"But I should think you'd want to see the *château*, dear. They say it's lovely and—"

"I've seen enough to last me for awhile. You can take a picture of it."

"But a picture!" scoffed his wife, and Doris looked up from her guidebook.

"This says that Napoleon's hat is there."

"By Gemini, I don't care if his toothbrush is there!" Petulant rage seized him. "I've seen his tomb; why in Sam Hill should I want to see his hat! I'm going to rest to-morrow, I tell you. You can go along. I'll hang around the *pension*—"

"*Pan-sy-on*, dad!"

"All right. But I'm not going, hat or no hat!"

After the children had gone to their rooms, Mrs. Keene reproached him.

"Really, it isn't setting a very good example for the children—your belittling historical things like that."

"I don't belittle 'em. If people can get a kick out of things like that, I don't begrudge 'em. If I can't it's not my fault, I guess. Anyway, I want a day off. I'm dog-tired. You're not."

He looked tired. Much of the healthy pink had been drained from his round, good-humored face, and there were dark puffs beneath his eyes. But his wife's face did not soften.

"Of course I'm not tired. I'm having a wonderful time." There was barbed criticism behind that. "I'm just thrilled by all these wonderful things. And here we are in Paris, the most wonderful city in the world. Why, you can just *feel* the mystery and romance—it—it's in the air! I should think it would almost sweep you off your feet."

Her eyes were glowing with the reflection of a vision he could not share—the first in twenty years. It was this realization—although she could not know it—that converted mere peevish ill nature into sullen anger.

"Well, it doesn't! I may be dumb and thick skinned, but it would take more than Napoleon's hat to sweep me off my feet! I'll stay right here."

III

BUT dad didn't hang around the *pension* for very long after his family had left him the next morning. No one *did* hang around there during the day, it seemed. Soon after breakfast, Miss Sudry's guests skipped out in twos and threes, armed with conscientious itineraries, and no more was seen of them until they began to dribble limply

back with just enough strength and time left to dress for dinner.

It was the discovery that he was the solitary—and thereby conspicuous—occupant of the big house, and not the lure of Paris, that made him put on his hat and go out when the maid came in to do his room. His feet were lame from countless miles of picture galleries and museums, but he thrust his hands into his pockets to give him an air of nonchalance and sauntered off toward the Champs Élysées.

Dad's had been a crowded if featureless life. He had never had time for retrospection, and introspection was as foreign to his nature as the more tangible vices. Life, as dad saw it, was a long, straight road, sprinkled with signposts labeled "Right" and "Duty." Although he was far from an egoist, he had a sturdy self-confidence which his modest success had strengthened and nothing had ever shaken—until now.

But now there was something wrong. There had been something wrong ever since he had left home.

He was still a little vague in his mind as to how he had happened to leave home at all. He had been vague in his mind, more or less, ever since they had steamed out of New York harbor. That was bad enough, but not so bad as this self-distrust—these misgivings his wife's words had released last night to nibble away his remaining store of assurance.

Fortunately none of this inner tumult was outwardly visible as dad turned into the Champs Élysées. If any of those mid morning promenaders looked at him, they saw a prosperous, correctly garbed American gentleman who probably knew that he was a little too heavy, but did not let it worry him.

It was an early September day, bland and mellow. The flower stalls were vivid islands of autumnal color along the pebbled stream of the promenade, and even the shabbiest of the women who passed him sported a gallant little *boutonnière* of orange, or crimson, or blue.

Dad knew that it was all very famous and beautiful—this avenue, with the Arc de Triomphe looming behind him and the Place de la Concorde spread at his feet. Even he had been moved by the sheer physical beauty of that splendid highway of departed kings, when he had first viewed it. But this morning he did not even see it. For once his thoughts were turned in-

ward, and each one was tipped with a sharp-pointed saber.

At the Rond Point he left the avenue and turned toward the river. A graceful bridge beckoned him—not because it was graceful, but because there were few pedestrians on it—and he was halfway across before he realized that this was his first solitary excursion in eleven weeks on the Continent. Always one or both of the children or his wife—or all of them, had been with him before.

He felt unexpectedly helpless. There was no one to direct his glance to this or that; no one to dissect his view and tell him what was worthy and what was not.

He supposed he ought to be able to tell for himself, to *feel* the beauty of a building or a bit of sculpture. But that was one of the things that was wrong with him. He didn't *feel* anything but strange—and out of place.

There must be something wrong with him—a man who couldn't really appreciate Napoleon's tomb—or his hat! He was just a plodder. He'd spent too many years with his nose to the grindstone. He'd lost the capacity for "being swept off his feet." He didn't have a thrill left—not a thrill.

When he reached the left bank he was on unexplored territory. He had his choice of a dozen narrow streets twisting off the *quai*, and he chose one at random and plunged into it. It was a dim little street, so narrow that the houses seemed to touch eaves.

Servants with laden baskets blocked the sidewalk and crowded him into the gutter where ragged children romped. Their shrill chatter irritated him as things we don't understand do irritate the best of us. He thought how Flora and Doris would exclaim over all this. "Quaint," they would call it, and "romantic."

Doggedly he plowed ahead. Half a hundred little cafés, with their tables temptingly spread on the sidewalk, lured him. But he could not bring himself to wrestle with an incomprehensible menu—besides, dad considered it little short of heathenish to eat outdoors—unless you were on a picnic in the woods, or something like that.

But it was hunger that halted his weary limbs at last; halted him before a neat little restaurant, its open windows breathing savory promises upon the air. Resolutely, dad propelled himself inside.

Around the four walls of the room ran a tufted bench, and this was flanked by innumerable small tables.

Dad would have chosen a chair and gazed at the wall, but the waiter would have none of that. Cavalierly, he divorced an unoccupied table from the bench, gallantly seated dad with his back to the wall, gently shoved the table against his knees.

"Voilà!" he cried happily, and produced a menu with a flourish.

IV

DAD accepted it. There was nothing else to do. He was as much a prisoner as if a twelve-foot wall lay between him and liberty. His eyes wandered over the penciled hieroglyphics. But that was a ruse. There was one thing he knew. He gave it voice—boldly.

"*Châteaubriand!*" Steak filet was one thing he knew. But it was not to save him. The waiter wrote it down gratefully, but he was not satisfied. He said as much.

There were other items on the menu, that, wedded to steak filet, would comprise a meal fit for the gods—or for *monsieur*. He named them; embellished them from his own rich imagination. Dad raised his arm above the deluge and waved him away, but the gesture only served to unleash another faucet.

Then out of the chaos a voice spoke—the sweetest voice in the world, speaking the only language in the world as it had never before been spoken:

"He is asking to know if you do not care for vegetables also, *monsieur*."

Dad looked up—and then down again. He spoke hesitatingly.

"Why, that's ever so kind of you. I—er—I would, of course. Trouble is—I'm a stranger here, you see—and this"—he tapped the menu—"might as well be Greek for all the good it does me."

"But, please, if I can be of any help."

"Thanks, ever so much!"

She turned the voice upon the waiter—shocking waste, dad thought. Her nimble little tongue skipped from French to English and back again.

There was a whole army of vegetables to choose from. An entire regiment of wines; pyramids of desserts. The owner of the voice and the waiter reviewed and considered all these, consulting dad gravely on each issue. He said "yes" to everything, so that, at last, the waiter tiptoed

portentously away and left dad to thank his benefactor.

This time he took off his glasses, and his gaze held long enough for him to falter his gratitude.

"But please do not thank me. The pleasure is mine. I know that it must be very difficult for a stranger."

"Well, it isn't easy," dad admitted thickly. If her voice was beautiful, then there were no words to describe her face—her mouth—her eyes.

Dad couldn't have said exactly what color her eyes were—or her hair. But she was lovely. There was a sort of warm glow about her as if the sun were shining on her through September foliage. And she was young—in her twenties, probably. And she was shy and yet friendly—as though she sensed that dad needed some one to be friendly with him just then.

She was at the next table, which was pulled close to dad's so that she was sitting not two feet distant. There was a green salad in the bowl before her, and a strip of red meat on her plate.

It was the most natural thing in the world that they should talk together while they ate. Dad ate ravenously. The dinner she had conjured for him, out of the mysteries of that incomprehensible menu, was perfection. The wine was mellow and not too sweet. Dad told her that he had been in Paris for two weeks, and she wanted to know if he were enjoying himself.

"Well," he temporized, "it's a wonderful city, and all that, of course."

It flooded her eyes with the merriest twinkles: "But you have not said that you were enjoying it."

He accepted the challenge.

"I'm afraid I haven't got the kick out of it I should have," he admitted. "I've seen most of your historical spots. The Louvre and Notre Dame and the old prison—what's its name?"

"Conciergerie?" she prompted.

"Yes, and St. Denis and Napoleon's Tomb. Wonderful—glad to have seen 'em, naturally, but they don't, well, sweep me off my feet as they do most people. Something wrong with me, I guess."

"But, no!" Her vehemence was a tonic to his flagging self-assurance. "Why should you think there was something wrong with you because you do not happen to have the taste for such things—for tombs and memorials and monuments to the dead.

For some people these have, as you say—the kick. For others, no!”

It struck dad as the soundest and cleverest bit of reasoning he had ever heard.

“That’s true,” he said. “Never thought of that angle. Been sort of backward, as a matter of fact, about expressing myself on the subject. Thought it must be some lack in my make-up.”

“Ah, no, *no!* It is, perhaps, that you are forward looking. You are interested in things that are alive and breathing.”

“That’s it,” he crowed. “We can have preferences in things like this as well as anything else, of course.”

“Of course,” she echoed. “And if you do not just happen to be interested in antiques—”

“Never could get much out of ’em,” he admitted.

She gave an impatient little ejaculation: “So many—like yourself—they come to Paris and they do not love her because they are made to think of her as old and awesome—something they must study. It is like going back to school for them.”

He brought his hands together emphatically: “That’s exactly what I’ve been trying to—” What he had started to say was “tell my wife,” but for some reason he finished with “say,” and he picked up his knife and fork.

By the use of one magic word which had gurgled like pouring cream, she had contrived to get his vegetables and meat together, and now his dessert came, little mounds of impalpable froth swimming in chocolate sauce. Then there was a triangle of cheese, and coffee, black and hot and bitter. After that there was a cigarette while the waiter took himself off to the nether regions and left them alone in their corner.

V

DAD had been taking wine with his meals for nearly three months, now. Certainly a half bottle of Chablis couldn’t have done it. But something was happening to him. Something inside him fluttered and spread its wings.

It was good to know that there was nothing wrong with you. Good to know that you weren’t so “queer,” so “dumb” that you couldn’t appreciate beauty. It was just that people’s taste for beauty varied like anything else. He was so alive and “forward looking” that the relics of the dead failed to interest him—that was all.

He made the girl share his coffee, and, while he smoked, they talked; rather, dad talked. The girl listened as to an oracle, drenching him now and again in a tinkling shower of laughter. But it was understanding laughter, warm and sympathetic. For the first time since he had left America, he felt at home; part of the picture instead of an uneasy spectator.

“Now, I suppose,” he hazarded, “you’ve got other things in this town of yours besides tombs and Napoleon’s hat!”

“Ah, but not for those who come here as to a term of school,” she chided him.

He said, then, with the wings fluttering boldly in his throat: “Well, if I knew my way about more—or if I understood the language, or if somebody—if you—”

She gave him a long, grave look of appraisal. Then she stood up and started to fumble in a bag of iridescent beads. Dad reached for her check and laid it over his own. It was a very modest check. She smiled her thanks.

“You can leave the money on the table,” she helped him.

They were outside together in the narrow street, with its hump-backed houses leaning over the pavements. A quaint street—romantic, thought dad.

“I haven’t any idea where I am,” he confided.

“Why this is the *rive gauche*—the left bank, you see,” she explained. “You must have walked a long way. Just over there is the cemetery Montparnasse. But do not distress yourself; we shall not go that way.”

“Good! I’ve certainly done my bit for the cemeteries.”

Her sweet, precise English, dad found entrancing. Although she was French, she had gone to school in England, she told him. But England couldn’t have taught her to purse her lips around every little vowel as though she was shaping it before she spoke it.

She led him through a labyrinth of narrow streets, their houses sagging over the pavement; fascinating old streets. He no longer minded the incomprehensible babble of voices. There was mystery in the sound. Musical mystery.

Once a ragged urchin pressed a limp bunch of violets upon them, and dad tossed him a five-franc note, and watched the girl tuck the bouquet into the belt of her trim blue frock. Again they stopped and bought a bag of piping hot chestnuts from a per-

sistent hag who leered toothless approval upon them.

They came finally to the *quai* and the river, and suddenly the girl grabbed dad's hand and commenced to run.

"Hurry and we shall catch it!"

"Catch what?" he panted.

"The boat!"

They stumbled, laughing, down some steps to the *quai* just as a pompous little boat came puffing up to the landing. When she puffed away again, they were on her deck. The girl led dad forward, still clinging to his hand.

The little boat had the speed of a respectable motor car. She lurched past tugs and dawdling coal barges. She zigzagged from one bank to the other with a cavalier disregard of smaller craft in her path. When she stopped to take on or discharge passengers, her penny whistle tooted a peremptory "Step lively, please!"

The river slashed through the city's heart, piling up on either side a superb panorama of lofty towers and palaces, sun-washed domes and conical spires tipped with gold. It all had for dad the gorgeous unreality of a fairy city. And yet it was not strange. He felt close to it—part of it. It was as if the girl had translated the very heart beats of the city for him.

But colonnade and turret could not hold against the speed of their reckless craft. Presently narrow peninsulas of green began to creep down to the embankment. Tiny villas with checkerboard gardens, open fields and gray old gabled houses, usurped the marble and the mortar. The widening river showed them lifting hills, glimpses of distant *châteaux*, chaste white roads ambling through an infinity of green.

From one side of the deck to the other strolled dad, on the leash of the girl's compelling lure. Her chin came almost to his stalwart tweed shoulder. The wind molded her blue frock to her slim young body, and whipped wisps of dark hair from beneath her little hat.

Whenever he stood close to her, he caught a whiff of scent entrancingly sweet. And in the depths of her eyes there was magic. Whenever they rested on him, he was stripped of a score of years and every ounce of superfluous flesh. They endowed him with the grace of Adonis and the shoulders of Hercules.

With all her frank cordiality there was mystery in her every gesture, in every flut-

ter of her long lashes. The mystery of the unknown, the "foreign" with which he had such a long-standing quarrel.

"Shall we get off at Suresnes," she asked him, "and go into the Bois?"

"That's all right with me," dad agreed.

"I can see that you are what you say—the out-of-door, person, no?"

She threw a sports championship into the suggestion, and dad lifted his chin.

"I am sort of a fresh-air fiend," he admitted modestly, and remembered that he slept with his windows open summer and winter.

VI

THE Bois welcomed them with a spread carpet of pine and hemlock needles, a latticed canopy of cool green, an elusive symphony of sound and scent. The girl disdained the path and led him off beneath the sentinel trees marching column upon column into the forest.

"You are pleased with this, no?" she asked, and before he could reassure her, she was down on her knees. "Ah, see! He is hungry. Poor *petite*."

It was a bold-eyed squirrel, looking as hungry as suspiciously fat jowls would permit. But some of the chestnut shells were refractory, so dad squatted beside her and played assistant chef. The little animal's greed brought him quite to dad's knee.

"You see he knows you are kind," the girl applauded.

"Guess he's just hungry," deprecated dad. "Here's another for the poor little beggar."

When the chestnuts were gone, they plunged deeper into the cool depths of the woods. Occasionally they passed nursemaids and rollicking children, or a pair of lovers arm in arm. Once they caught a glimpse of a group of old men playing bowls with their coats off—old men—as old as dad had been that morning.

"Now close your eyes," the girl told him presently, "and I shall lead you—so."

Dad shut his eyes, but that was no particular deprivation. All his senses were alert as they had never been before. Those silky fingers in his, for example—

"Now, *voilà*!"

And there, close kin to Aladdin's, was another palace. It had a pillared front and a broad red terrace with snowy tables moored beneath an awning of hemlock boughs and artfully trained shrubs. They

drifted to an isolated cul-de-sac, and the girl sank into her chair with a little, laughing sigh.

"Voilà!" she said again.

"Look here," dad began, settling himself beside her, "I've always wondered just what that meant—exactly." She cocked her head on one side, puzzled. "You know, that word—you just said it. It seems to me everybody says it."

A white-clad jinni popped up beside the table long enough to leave a miniature flower garden in full bloom at their elbows and take their order for tea. Then the girl's smile found dad.

"You mean *voilà*—is that it? But you know—"

"Well, not the exact meaning."

"It is as though you say 'There it is' or 'That is that.'"

"I see," said dad. Her eyes reproached him.

"It is that you are too modest, you Americans. You do not speak what you know because you fear you will not do it perfectly—as you do all things. Now, you can say *Voilà!*"

"*Voilà!*" essayed dad boldly, and she clapped her hands.

"*Brava!* You have the tongue. I was sure of it."

The flower garden of pastry absorbed them. "I am so fond of pastry," the girl confided.

Dad lifted them out one by one until she took her plate away.

"Nothing like French pastry," he declared judicially.

When they were drunk with tea and surfeited with sweets, dad lit a cigarette. They were not alone, naturally. But that perfect delusion of seclusion which belongs only to France, was theirs. No one stared. No importune waiters pressed premature checks upon them. No hungry crowd waited in the offing for their table.

When they finally took to the woods again, there was a sleepy, late afternoon drone in the air; a hum of drowsy insects and birds. The girl took off her hat.

To his delight her hair was long and not so dark as he had suspected—not when the sun found it. It rippled back into a loose knot on her neck. There was more color in her cheeks, now, and her merry laugh was like an ecstatic child's when they found a Punch and Judy show in full swing near the gates.

Dad hadn't seen a Punch and Judy show since he was ten. Not one word of this one was intelligible to him, but he laughed uproariously, and threw a five-franc note into the hat when it passed him.

When the little curtain had made its jerky descent upon the annihilated hero, the touch of the girl's hand on his arm urged him forward again. He was moving now in a rosy nebula. He was only dimly aware of the distances they covered; of bright shop windows lining a long avenue that led from the Bois; of riding for the first time in a tram; of strolling again through narrow streets; of finding himself at last, seated on a bench in a little triangular park with gay flower beds pinned like rosettes to its rolled lawns.

VII

THE sun was low over the distant roofs. Nursemaids were coaxing their charges home, hoop and ball laden. Couples passed silently along the paths, their arms locked.

For a moment they sat in silence, the languorous, luxurious silence of physical fatigue. Then, suddenly dad was aware of a turbulence within him—a turbulence born of the pressure of a slim arm against his. It was as though he had swallowed some lawless philter that was churning the blood in his veins into a tidal wave; urging him to heady recklessness.

Furtively he moved a little closer to the quiescent figure beside him. The girl looked up fleetingly and smiled.

"It has been pleasant, this small excursion, no?"

"Certainly—has," dad agreed faintly.

"It is because you are a pleasant companion," she told him. "You have the spirit of play—of adventure. And now you will think more kindly of my Paris, is it not so?"

She lifted her eyes again to find dad's fixed upon her with the intensity of a charmed bird.

"K-kindly," he stammered; "how could I—how could I think any other way when—when you—"

Abruptly she bounced to her feet. Her eyes were grave now, although her lips were still smiling. "But see how late it grows. I must be going."

Once more she glanced at him fleetingly—he had risen also, was standing beside her—and there was a latent sapience in the depths of her young eyes.

"My charge is fifty francs, if you please, *monsieur*," she said very slowly and distinctly.

For a moment he did not comprehend, but stared dazedly down at her. Partly the removal of that illicit pressure on his arm had freed him. Now, when the significance of her words penetrated, they had the same head clearing effect as a cold shower.

Mechanically he reached back for the pigskin wallet while red stained his face from collar to hair roots.

"I hope," the girl said, looking down demurely, "that you do not think it too much to ask. Many guides ask more. For you I should like to have done it for nothing—"

But that small interval was all that dad had needed.

"Nonsense!" he boomed. "Worth twice that amount to me. Yes, yes, I insist upon your taking the hundred—wouldn't feel right about it—I insist!"

"*Merci, monsieur*. Thank you—and, good-by, *monsieur*!" She made him a little bob, polite, impersonal.

When she had gone dad reached for his handkerchief and mopped his face. He lit a cigarette, remembered he had already smoked more than his daily quota, and threw it away. He straightened his shoulders and made for the gate, pursing his lips for a whistle as he went. After one or two unsuccessful efforts, he achieved a careless tune.

VIII

His wife was dressing for dinner when he let himself into their room at the *pension*. She arched her brows in amazement at him.

"My dear! Where have you been? We've been back nearly an hour. So you went out after all!"

"Oh, yes," he said lightly. "Thought I'd go out and have a look around."

"I'm so glad you did, dear! Where did you go?"

"Oh, I went over to the *rive gauche*—"

"The *rive gauche*!"

"The left bank, you know," he explained. "Picked up a guide over there and she—"

"She! A woman?"

"Why, yes," he admitted carelessly. "She was a good guide, too. I told her the sort of thing I wanted to see, and she

caught on right off. We went up the Seine to the Bois and—"

"That's one place I simply must see!"

"I'll take you some day. Nice place to have tea out there, too. Good pastry. Saw an old-time Punch and Judy show, too. Darnedest turn-out you ever saw; cute as the dickens."

She was looking at him wonderingly.

"Dad Keene, you don't mean to tell me that you enjoyed yourself!"

"Why, sure, I did," he said belligerently, and swaggered across to his bureau. "Had a good time. Didn't waste any time on tombs or churches, either! Trouble is, I'm not interested in things like that. They're too dead and I'm too alive. Don't mind going sight-seeing, but what I'm interested in is life. *Voilà*!"

"Dad, dear!" She went over to where he stood tugging at his tie, and put her arms around him. "I believe you've succumbed at last. I told you if you'd just let yourself go it would sweep you off your feet!"

Automatically he patted her shoulder, but now it was his turn to look askance.

"By George, that's just about what happened!" he murmured gratefully.

IX

In one of the more select art studios not far from the restaurant where dad had dined, an American student in a paint-smeared smock was rocking with mirth.

"And you sacrificed your whole afternoon—*croquis* class, too—in order to tote an old boy around gay Paree!"

"But yes," dad's guide said, with a twinkle of lips and eyes. "He was a countryman of yours, and he was most forlorn. Some one had told him that he must see Napoleon's hat, and that depressed him. And see!" From a bag of iridescent beads she drew a hundred-franc note. "I have this for my trouble."

"You don't mean to say that you took money for it!"

They were the same age, but the slow smile of the young French girl had the wisdom of ages behind it.

"It was necessary, my friend. Fortunately I thought of it in time," she explained softly. "You see, he will now remember me merely as a small matter of business, and, after all, a hundred francs is not too much to pay for a clear conscience, *n'est-ce pas*?"

The Inevitable Answer

GIGGLING TOOLIE ETTER AND SOBER-MINDED DANGER DODSON
EVOLVE A PHILOSOPHY QUITE GOOD ENOUGH
FOR WHITE FOLKS, TOO

By E. K. Means

"SKEETER, how does a feller bust up a weddin' whut is about to come off?" Bim Etter asked, as he seated himself beside Skeeter Butts upon the steps of the Hen-Scratch soft drink stand.

"I ain't dat kind of mattermony fixer," Skeeter answered easily. "I'm got a reputation in dis here Tickfall town fer bringin' weddin's to pass."

"A man who kin start 'em ought to know how to stop 'em," Bim argued in a persuasive tone. "Gawd knows, I needs you to advice me some along dem lines."

"Who aims to git wedlocked?" Skeeter grinned.

"My gal Toolie an' dat Danger Dodson nigger."

"Lawd, Lawd!" Skeeter sighed. "I shore am gittin' old an' sot. Useter was, no gal in Tickfall of de nigger persuasion could git married unless she was fust courted by me. I been declined wid thanks by all de culled females in dis county. An' here is one done growed up an' made her arrangements, an' I ain't even knowed about her."

"She growed up kinder suddent an' unexpected, even on me," Bim explained apologetically. "I been so pestered by dem four boy brats I'm got dat my gal kinder slipped past my mind."

"Is you got objections to Danger Dodson?" Skeeter asked.

"Naw."

"Is you so fond of yo' onliest gal chile dat you cain't part wid her?"

"Naw."

"How come you don't want her to marry?" Skeeter asked. "You objects. Taint reasomble unless you got a good reason."

Bim did not reply immediately. He filled

and lighted his pipe with great deliberation, and vitiated the morning air with his vile tobacco before he attempted a reply. Then, with due caution, he ventured:

"I'm skeart you won't ketch on, Skeeter, as you ain't never cormitted mattermony on yo'se'f. But married life ain't by no means whut young folks thinks it is. Naw, suh, it's plum' diffunt."

"I'm done heard folks say dat befo' now," Skeeter snickered.

"Of co'se, when a mistake is done been made, a feller feels like he is in fer a hard time, an' so he gits used to it," Bim said in a complaining tone.

"Dat's so," Skeeter agreed easily.

"Now, me—I'm pesticated to death tryin' to make a livin', bothered outen my right mind by dem dang bad boys I'm got, nagged outen my peace an' satisfaction by my fat ole wife—an' dis onliest gal, she wants to go and git herself in de same bad fix hitchin' up wid dat man."

"Too bad," Skeeter sighed sympathetically. "De little fool don't know no better."

"Dat's jest it," Bim muttered. "She ain't seed whut a fix I'm in, an' I cain't tell her. She'd blab it to her maw, an' atter dat come off—Lawdy!"

Bim broke off and began to fan himself with his hat as if anticipating the hot time he would be sure to have in consequence.

"Ef you cain't tell her, let her find out by expe'unce," Skeeter suggested. "You take yo' fat wife outen dat cabin, git out yo'se'f, an' let dat gal hab a day takin' keer of dem four boys. Atter she finds out whut noosances chillun is, she won't crave to git married an' hab no pickaninnies of her own—mebbe."

"How come you say 'mebbe'?" Bim asked.

"I's noticed dat all young married people starts out wid de notion dat dey will show de ole folks a better way," Skeeter laughed.

II

THE next morning Bim Etter pushed back his chair from the breakfast table, lighted a vile corncob pipe, puffed the smoke around his head, and glowered at four negro boys who sat at the same table, busily consuming their food. He cleared his throat loudly and began:

"Gawge, yo' maw tole me dat you set dis here cabin on fire yistiddy."

"Yes, suh," George replied, rolling his eyes. "It wus a accidunt. Me an' another boy wus makin' a incense pot like de white folks has in deir church, an' de fire melted de bottom outen de tin can while we wus swinging it aroun', an' de hot ashes wasted all over de place. But Toolie he'ped us put it out."

Bim Etter cleared his throat again, and turned his gaze upon his eldest son.

"Pete, yo' maw specified dat you slipped into her kitchen yistiddy an' emptied all de flour outen de bag into de dishpan, an' stirred up a dough cake wid de poker of de cook stove. Whut you gwine esplain about dat?"

"Yes, suh," Pete answered with downcast eyes. "I poured de water in de dishpan fust, an' it 'peared like it jes' took mo' an' mo' water to melt up de flour, till it tuck all de flour whut wus. I aimed to make jes' a little cake, but I got so much flour dat I couldn't make nothin'. Toolie gib de mess to de pigs."

Bim Etter turned his attention to the third boy, who had begun to wiggle and look very uncomfortable.

"Jim, yo' maw says dat you spent de day yistiddy ridin' my little Jersey heifer aroun' dis yard. Whut you got to specify about dat?"

"Naw, suh, I didn't really ride her, pappy," Jim answered guiltily. "Dat heifer ain't got no mane to hold on to, an' she slants down from behime to de front, an' jes' a little kick-up behime makes a nigger boy slide off over dat calf's head. I tried it frequent, an' it happened dat way eve'y time. I didn't hurt de calf none, but she shore skun all de skin off my hands."

Jim held up two raw, scratched, swollen palms for parental inspection. Bim Etter

eyed them without sympathy, and then turned to his youngest son.

"Tom, yo' maw specified dat you drapped two water buckits, de little red chair de white folks gib you, an' a lot of bricks down de well. Is dat so?"

"Yes, suh," the little darky answered timidly. "I wus tryin' to fill up de well so maw wouldn't hab to reach down so fur wid de rope on de buckit to git de water. Toolie got 'em all up fer me agin, excusin' de bricks."

Bim Etter smoked in silence for a long time, while the boys wriggled and glanced at each other with shifty, uneasy eyes. A tall girl came in and set a plate of biscuits upon the table.

"Toolie," Bim Etter spoke, "Danger Dodson specify to me yistiddy dat you an' him wus thinkin' about cormittin' mattermony. Is dat so?"

"Yes, suh," the girl giggled, covering her mouth with her apron. "Him an' me is figgerin' on it, but we ain't added up de figgers yit. Danger is comin' fer de answer to-night."

Bim Etter arose to his feet and glowered at his family. The smoke from his pipe hid his face like a cloud. Then he pawed away the smoke and began:

"All you niggers listen to my orate. You nigger boys is done made me sick an' tired wid all yo' cuttin' up. You gotter behave—"

"Yes, pappy," the quartet answered.

"Ef I hears any mo' news about yo' nonsense doin's, I'm gwine skin de hide offen dis whole outfit of boy chillun."

"Yes, pappy."

"An' now, Toolie, I gwine say dis to you. Dat Danger Dodson is a po', igernunt, hard-wuckin', well-meanin' nigger, an' I ain't got no objections to him. Ef he ain't got no mo' sense dan to want to marry, I hopes you is got mo' sense dan to encourage him up in his foolishness."

"Tain't no foolishness, pap," the girl giggled.

"My Lawd!" Bim Etter exclaimed. "Is you lived wid me an' yo' maw all dese endurin' years an' ain't learnt no sense about gittin' married? Look at de job me an' yo' maw put up on ourselves! An' now we is got you an' dese here four boy brats to pesticate de lives outen us."

"Yes, suh, I sees!" Toolie said gloomily.

"All right—learn some brains!" Bim shouted. "Maw, you orate dis fool gal

about whut she's gittin' into, an' I hopes when dat Danger Dodson comes to-night she'll tell him to hunt a nigger wife somewhere else. I ain't got no real objections to Danger, Toolie, but I's sayin' dis fer yo' own good. Look at me an' yo' maw!"

Shaking the ashes from the bowl of his pipe into the fireplace, Bim Etter put on his ragged hat and walked out of the cabin.

"You better listen to yo' pap, honey," came a rumbling injunction from a mountain of fat which was Toolie's mother. "Me an' him done tried dis mattermony bizzness, an' 'tain't nothin' but abomernation of spirit. I got to go down to de hotel to cook to-day, an' I leaves you wid dese here four boys. You take keer of 'em fer me, an' eve'y times dey gits in devilmint you jes' study dat dey is yo' brats an' dat you got to lib wid 'em an' fetch an' tote fer 'em all yo' life. Atter dat, you'll git yo' answer ready fer dat coon to-night."

III

Two hours later Toolie built a fire under the big washpot in the back yard, brought out the few dresses which she owned, and prepared to wash them.

Jim Etter, the youngest, came around the side of the cabin, dragging a blacksnake whip about three times as long as himself.

"Toolie, please, mum, go git a knife an' cut de cracker offen dis whup fer me."

"Git outen my way, chile," Toolie's high, shrill voice proclaimed. "Whut you hangin' aroun' dis washpot fer? De nex' news I knows, you'll be scalded like a pig in dis hot water. I ain't got no knife. Go 'way!"

The little darky sat down upon the ground and gazed into the fire, his face tuning up to cry. In his exasperation, he slashed at the fire with his big whip. The ragged, worn cracker began to burn. With a grin, he left the end of the whip in the flame.

Toolie went into the house for some soap. When she came out, her clothes were burning merrily, and the leaves of the fig tree under which she had placed them were withering in the heat. With a loud screech, she ran toward the burning garments, seized a bucket of water, and dashed it upon the flames. What she rescued from the fire was absolutely useless as wearing apparel for any human being.

Jim set up a loud wail.

"I didn't aim to do it, Toolie," he squalled. "I was tryin' to burn de cracker

offen dis whup, an' when it got right hot I jerked it outen de fire, an' de cracker come offen de end an' fell right in de middle of all yo' duds."

"Why didn't you grab up some water an' put de clothes out?" Toolie shrieked.

"I was skeart my whup would burn up while I was puttin' out yo' clothes," Jim wailed. "Excusin' dat, you said dat water would scald me like I was a little pig."

"Dar ain't much diffunce betwix' bein' scalded an' bein' skint," Toolie said positively, as she reached for the blacksnake whip. "I's gwine learn you to let whips an' clothes be alone."

She laid hold of the boy's collar and applied the whip until he managed to tear himself away, leaving most of his shirt in his sister's hands, and took refuge under the cabin.

Toolie went into the cabin and sat down.

"All my nicest clothes is plum' ruind," she sighed. "Ef Danger comes to see me dis night, I won't hab nothin' fittin' to wear jes' because dat pickaninny monkeyed wid dat whip. Oh, Lawd, ef he wus my chile—"

She broke off here and gave herself up to solemn meditation. She understood now what her mother had meant when she left the children in her care and asked her to consider that they were her own for one day only.

She had taken care of the four boys for years, for she was several years older than the oldest boy, but she had never thought what an annoyance the boys might be to her if she were married and they were her own children.

Her meditation was interrupted by a loud wail down the street, and she recognized the voice.

Rushing out, she shaded her eyes with the corner of her apron, and saw two little negro boys supporting her brother George by the arms as they came down the street. Behind the three trailed a crowd of little black companions.

George's voice wailed louder as he saw his sister standing at the rickety gate and knew that help and sympathy were near at hand.

"Whut's de matter, Gawge? Whut ails ye?" Toolie shrieked as she ran toward them.

But George did not answer. He crumpled down in a heap upon the sandy street and howled like a maniac. His hands, his face,

and the front of his shirt were covered with blood.

"Us wus playin' baseball," a little negro boy informed her. "We didn't had no bat. We tuck an' broke off a fence picket an' sharpened one end so we could hold it good. Gawge wus pitchin', an' I slapped at de ball an' de bat slipped outen my hand an' hit Gawge in de mouf."

"Blessid gracious!" Toolie screamed. "I bet it mighty nigh kilt him."

"Yes'm," the little batter answered. "It sloshed up bofe his lips an' knocked out one toof. Gawge oughter had looked out fer hisself."

They conducted George into the house, laid him upon the bed, and, by the application of cold water and various remedies, finally got his howls quieted. His baseball comrades slipped away quietly, and Toolie sat down to keep the flies off of her brother with a turkey wing while he went to sleep.

In the excitement Jim had crawled out from under the cabin, and his experience with the clothes had been forgotten. He came up to Toolie's side, as she sat beside the bed, patted her on the shoulder, and said in a loving tone:

"Toolie, ef you an' Danger gits married, will you let me come an' live wid you, so I kin be yo' little boy an' you kin nuss me?"

"You git outen here, you little fool!" Toolie answered sharply. "Does you think I'm gwine git mysef tied up in any mess like dis? I done had enough trouble dis mawnin' to las' me de rest of my days."

In the afternoon Toolie went to the kitchen to bake three apple pies, and she placed them upon the window sill to cool.

"Don't us git no pie?" Pete wanted to know.

"Naw," Toolie told him "Danger Dodson is comin' here dis night to see me, an' us is gwine eat dem pies ourselves. You leave 'em be!"

When Toolie left the kitchen, Pete slipped out in the back yard, picked up a barrel, and brought it into the kitchen. He turned it upside down so he could stand upon the bottom, and found that it made him just high enough to reach the three pies upon the high sill of the window.

Both hands were stretched up to help himself to one, when the bottom of the barrel caved in. Pete went crashing through and was just tall enough to hit his flat nose on the edge of the barrel as he landed on the floor.

There was a loud scream, which brought Toolie on a run.

She arrived just in time to see the barrel turn over, roll out of the kitchen door and down a flight of ten steps into the yard, with a squalling negro boy inside it.

She ran in pursuit and rescued Pete. His nose was bleeding frightfully, and the nails within the barrel had torn his clothes and flesh and he was suffering grievously.

"Go atter de dorctor," she shrieked to the two other children as she carried the howling boy into the house.

Dr. Moseley came and worked for an hour, while Toolie and the negroes of the neighborhood stood around, horrified by the frightened little darky's screams.

"He'll be all right soon," the doctor said, as he picked up his instruments. "He was not hurt much—a few scratches and a broken nose."

"It's a pity it didn't break his devilish little neck!" Toolie exclaimed. "I never wus so pested wid chillun in my life."

"They certainly are nuisances," the physician grinned, as he picked up his hat to go. "I have four of my own, and I know."

When the neighborhood quieted down, only Bino Saro remained—an old withered woman, wrinkled like an Indian squaw.

"Bino," Toolie asked, "does all families hab trouble with deir chillun like us?"

"Honey, dar ain't no good chillun in de worl'," Bino answered with deep conviction. "No maw ain't willin' to let de neighbors slanderize her chillun, an' she takes up fer 'em as much as she kin, but all de time she knows dey ain't good, never wus good, an' ain't never gwine git no better. Dey jes' gits wuss."

"Ain't dar no way to raise chillun so dey will be good?" Toolie inquired.

"No'm; dat is whar all signs fails," Bino chuckled. "I's seed eve'y kind of way tried on, but deir maw ain't never fotch up nothin' wuth braggin' about."

There was a loud whoop in the back yard, and Toolie and Bino started for the sound. They stopped in the kitchen door and looked out. What they saw was a high-diving stunt, the aftermath of a recent street carnival.

Tom Etter and a dozen other pickaninies had dug a hole in the yard three feet in diameter and four feet deep. They had drawn water from the well and had filled the hole to the brim. By the side of the

hole they had set up a dilapidated step-ladder which two little boys had to hold to keep it from toppling over.

"Ladies an' gentermens," a little darky squealed, "I now interjuices Hodo Bolo, de high di-dapper, whut dives offen dis here watermillium foot ladder into dis water!"

Thereupon Tom Etter climbed the step-ladder, stood precariously upon the top, and, waving his hands dramatically, squealed:

"I'll be down in er minute!"

Even so, he came down sooner than he expected.

The boys who held the ladder stepped aside to keep the muddy water from splashing over them, the rickety ladder collapsed, and the whole thing came crashing down.

Tom had expected to land feet first in the pool, but he went in on his head, and the ladder came splashing in after him.

There was a howl of fright, and the muddy water was thrashed into fury by the efforts of the high diver to escape. His terrified screams could have been heard for half a mile, and when Toolie and Bino arrived upon the scene he had swallowed so much of the contents of the pool that he was almost unconscious.

They dragged him out, shook the water out of him, and he joined his three brothers in the house, and was stretched out upon the bed.

Bino Saro sat down to keep Toolie company awhile.

"How come you is axin' so much about chillun?" she inquired. "Is you studyin' about gittin' married?"

"No'm, not perzackly," Toolie answered. "My maw, she been argufyin' me about not gittin' married an' tole me to study dis here fambly an' learn mo' better."

"Dem is shore good advices, Toolie," Bino Saro remarked. "I ain't got but jes one word fer eve'y nigger whut is thinkin' about gittin' hitched, an' dat word is 'Don't.'"

"Ain't no married folkses happy?" Toolie asked.

"No'm. Dey pussuades demselves dat dey is," Bino told her.

"Ef married folks ain't happy, how come widders always gits married agin?" Toolie asked.

"Huh!" Bino grunted. "Some folks jes' nachelly ain't got no sense."

"Is you ever been married, Bino?" Toolie asked.

"Lawd, honey, I been married six times," Bino chuckled, "an' I had sebenteen chillun. I knows whut I's talkin' about."

Then into the open gate came Bim Etter and maw.

They entered the room, listened with many exclamations to Toolie's story of the day's adventures and mishaps, and then looked their injured children over.

"Well," Bim Etter announced at last, "I tole dese here brats dat dey'd git a whalin' ef dey got into mischief, but dey done got deirselves hurted so bad I's skeart to whip 'em."

"Now, Toolie," the mother exclaimed, as she seated her mountain of fat on a big chair, "you understands whut I means when I says dat married life ain't wuth livin'! Yo' paw an' me, us is jes got kotch in a trap an' we cain't git out."

IV

Just after dark, as Toolie and her parents sat upon the porch, there was a loud, clear, whippoorwill call from the trees at the corner of the street.

Toolie sprang to her feet, then sank slowly back into her chair. The day had been full of excitement, and she felt tired and worn. Her dresses had been burned, her rosy dreams had been shattered, all that she had seen and heard through the day had soured her.

If Danger Dodson had come in the morning, her answer would have been ready for him; if he had come at noon, she could still have gladdened his heart with her reply; but now she knew the inevitable answer to the question.

The whippoorwill call sounded again.

"No weddin' bells fer me, maw," Toolie giggled. "I done learned better."

"Ain't you gwine down dar an' tell him so?" the mother inquired.

"Yes'm, I reckon I mought as well. De ole fool will whistle under dem trees all night ef I don't." The call sounded again. "I'll be back in a minute, maw," she said, as she arose and started toward the gate. "Tain't gwine take me no time to say 'No' to dat nigger."

Ten minutes later she returned. Danger Dodson was with her. They walked slowly, sedately. Toolie came up the steps and seated herself in a chair. Danger dropped down in his favorite seat upon the porch floor, his back against a post.

"We done got it settled, maw," Toolie

said, after a minute of silence. "Me an' Danger talked it all out."

"Whut did you tell him?" a voice inquired from the maternal mountain of fat.

"I promised to marry him," Toolie answered with a snicker.

"I thought you said you done learnt some sense?" her mother snapped.

"We is," Toolie chuckled. "Me an' Danger is done studied up a new way to be married an' happy. We is gwine do our married lives diffunt."

Unk

THIS PONY HAD NO HEART FOR POLO, BUT HE SCORED BRILLIANTLY IN ANOTHER HIGHLY FASCINATING GAME

By Margaret and Fabius Shipp

IF an army officer were the grandson of a Civil War major general and the great-great-grandson of a Revolutionary hero, his official record would not chronicle it. It's different with an army horse, his pedigree is carefully recorded.

Captain Dabney had bought a five-year-old from a rancher who had brought him to the post and offered him for an even hundred dollars. He was a stocky animal, close-coupled, sound, and with good bone, but with the typical coarse head and short neck of the range pony.

On his descriptive card, Dabney set down his breeding, using the customary abbreviation for "unknown":

Sire: Unk.
Dam: Unk.
Name: —

He hesitated a moment and then made a mental ditto: "Might as well make it Unk all the way through."

And that was Unk's christening party.

After a year on the isolated border post, Unk was a sort of institution. He had distinct characteristics: a hard heart, a determined temper, an unconquerable aversion to polo, and an almost inexhaustible strength. He was as fresh as paint after an all-day ride in maneuvers, and he seemed to like cross-country riding along rocky trails and bare mountainsides.

He was sure-footed, and so good a jumper over natural obstacles—a ditch, a fence, or a tree across the road—that Dabney

was doubly chagrined at the regimental horse shows when Unk refused to take a jump not half so difficult as one he would take without hesitation on the open road.

As for polo, Dabney's colored striker put the case admirably:

"Unk's got a way of lookin' round at me like he was studyin' to hisself: 'Dunn, what's it all about?' I don't b'lieve that pony is evah goin' to learn what polo is about. Gawd knows, he jest natchelly hates it!"

The horses used for polo at the post were cold-blooded, and, as a general rule, a cold-blooded pony has his limits at polo. It takes the thoroughbred or the half-breed to show gameness, heart and speed.

A cold-blooded pony may play a good game, but he does it with the confession that it is from training and the habit of obedience; he doesn't put his heart into the aristocrat of games. That demands a strain of thoroughbred blood.

"Do y' know, I believe Unk is locoed?" said a junior lieutenant, very new on the border and very keen to see a locoed horse, a Gila monster, a den of rattlesnakes, and all the rest of the Western paraphernalia made familiar in fiction. "I tell you I watched him when you went into that last chukker, and if ever an animal's eyes gleamed red and malicious and darn disgusted, it was Unk's. I'm convinced he's locoed."

"Blah!" retorted Dabney. "Hard-headed little cuss, but a peach on a prac-

tice march. I think myself that polo is beyond him, but I'll give him a month or so yet."

II

THE following afternoon Dabney felt it was an ill-advised decision. He was meeting a knock-in from the back line when, just as he was leaning far out of his saddle for the passing ball, Unk took advantage of the situation and swerved sharply to the other side, leaving Dabney "on the ball" actually instead of figuratively, and with a broken arm.

There was a sympathetic buzz of exclamations when Captain Burton helped Dabney into the little polo house at the side of the field, where the army women served tea between chukkers.

"I always did say Unk was mean and common," said one woman, whereupon Dabney rather came to his defense.

"I've been a fool to put so much time on the damn little bronc, but I took a sort of fancy to him. Ready, Burton?"

His arm was hurting furiously, and Dabney gave no thought to Unk, taking it for granted that he would be brought back as usual to the polo stables. The next morning Unk was reported missing, and, what was worse, Dabney's Saumur saddle—which he had brought from France and which had cost nearly as much as Unk—was gone, too.

His striker was smitten with remorse and so scared that it was far greater proof of his innocence than if he had concocted a glib lie.

Dunn had left the lines behind the field where he should have stayed to look after his troop commander's horse, and had rushed back to the post to attend to an intimate matter. His bunkie had brought in some mescal from across the border, and Dunn had overheard a remark made by the provost sergeant which made him realize that the sergeant had wind of it. So he tore back to warn his bunkie to cache it, and called out casually to a man of another troop: "Look out for the captain's horse."

"Must be drunk," thought that soldier. "What's he soundin' off to me to look out for my captain's horse? Ain't I doin' it?"

So when Unk was led back to the line and tied at the end of it, there was nobody there who knew what every soldier in Dabney's troop knew, that Unk always broke

loose from a halter and had to be tied with a neck strap.

The last chukker of the game was played as the afternoon light waned. Somebody tossed aside a chipped polo ball, and it fell just at Unk's feet. His eyes gleamed red and fiery; he pulled back at his halter until it broke, and he was free.

Just then Mrs. Burton's pleasant voice called out to the soldiers:

"Don't you want some of these cakes and sandwiches?"

The picket line was momentarily deserted for the polo house, where Mrs. Burton handed out a tray piled high for the men.

An incredible opportunity! Unk slipped quietly away, soundlessly moving off in the opposite direction from the post. The conformation of the country and the gathering twilight obscured him. He went along easily all night, headed for his old home.

It was a rough way, a long way, and a hard, steep trail across the Whetstone Mountains, but the grazing was good after the summer rains. And freedom was good to a horse that had run wild the first care-free years of his life and then had been forced into a crowded year of equitation, maneuvers, parades, field days, drills, and, worst of all, polo! He rested and grazed, but he went on his way unswervingly.

Perhaps he would have given a horse laugh if he could have known how the country about the post was being searched for him and the Saumur saddle he wore. As a prospector reported that he had seen a stray horse going toward the Mule Mountains, most of the searching was done in that wrong direction.

Unk knew exactly how to go to the T-Bar Ranch, where he was foaled, but even if he could have gone to it whinnying, "Dear to my heart are the scenes of my colthood," he would have had a shock of surprise at its changed aspect.

III

THE old ranch house was gone. It had been burned, leaving only the blackened remnants of adobe walls. Instead, there was built on a site to one side of it a trim, "ready-made" bungalow, which blazed white in its paint in the bright, clear Arizona air. There was a window ledge where pink petunias, pink verbenas, and pink geraniums were drooping slightly, as if somebody had forgotten to water them.

And there was a wide porch on one side

of the tiny house with a couch on which a very little girl was lying. Two high spots of color burned in her cheeks, and her hands were holding a fairy tale book as if it were too heavy for her.

Unk approached warily. He was hungry and thirsty, for grass was less substantial than the plentiful hay and oats to which he was accustomed, and he had not struck a stream during the latter part of his journeying. Home and not home! Poor Unk seemed unable to escape from the mystery of a confusing world.

The sick child gave a cry of wonder and clapped her hands.

"Oh, Dee, come here, come quick! Here's a horse! Oh, Dee, I'm not fooling; he's just as much alive as you 'n' me!"

Dee came running out of the tiny house. She wore a blue and white gingham apron—it was clean, but it *was* mussy—and her brown bobbed hair was wavy, but there was a smear of soot across her forehead, a soupçon of flour, not powder, on her cheek; and her eyes, although blue as that wild flower which is like a drift of sky across the Arizona plains, were full of care, of anxiety, of indecision.

"I'm making a cake, Patsy, and the hateful recipe won't tell which goes in first. Want anything?"

Patsy giggled delightedly. "Just want to show you our horse!"

"Oh-h!" Dee gave a long breath of astonishment. "Be still as you can be, honey, while I run out to the stable and find something to catch him with."

Unk, although thoroughly capable of leading Dee the wildest dance of her life, submitted rather quietly to being caught and led to his old stable, where a 1919 Ford also was nestling.

Dee pumped water into the trough, offered Unk lumps of sugar, which he eyed distrustfully and did not accept, and then she took out the car.

"I must run over to the store to get some feed, Pat. How I do hope his owner won't come until I've had one good ride!"

"His owner?" echoed Patsy in surprised indignation. "Why, *you* are his owner, Dee. Didn't he come sniffin' right up to our house zackly like the magic ro-an steed in my fairy story? Only it b'longed to a prince."

Dee's voice was tender. "Well, lambkin, I hope the prince is under a magic spell like the Sleeping Beauty, and that it will be a

hundred years before he can wake up and come after his pony. Oh, mercy, what's that burning? My—poor—cake!"

This last was wailed back from the diminutive kitchen.

"If there were only some way of putting those eggs back into their shells, I'd never risk them in a cake again," declared Dee ruefully when she came back. "Maybe I'll find some at the store."

She rattled off in the car, waving a hand at Patsy.

The one shopping emporium of a wide expanse of country was the adobe general store with fly-specked windows, in which were displayed tobacco for the male customer, faded pink writing paper, evidently for the ladies, and a jar of magenta stick candy, presumably to decide the question of the survival of the fittest among the juvenile inhabitants.

"Any feed for a horse?" queried Dee eagerly.

"Sure. Haven't I told you I've got everything from a pig yoke to an engagement ring? It's easy to tell which 'll be needed for you," the storekeeper made his perennial little joke. "I'll put the feed in your lim'sine."

"Any eggs?"

"Sure. Four duck eggs. Egg remnants at barg'in prices."

"And a bridle, please?"

"Got an extry hackamore I'll be glad to lend you."

"Thanks, neighbor."

Late that afternoon, after Unk had fed and rested, Dee went for the ride she had yearned for every day since they came to the T-Bar Ranch. Up a narrow trail to the long stretch of mesa, where one seemed to ride on the very crest of the world straight toward the sunset—an extravagantly flaming sunset.

She had scarcely realized how weary she was of narrow horizons and a routine which stretched only from the house to the store, three miles away. Even if the owner came to-morrow, she had won a glorious afternoon from chance.

Dee had put up a notice at the store which amused the occasional cow-puncher who rode by. There were very few of them, because that part of Arizona was sparsely settled. The notice read:

Strayed: Into the T-Bar Ranch, very pretty brown horse with glossy coat, roached mane and plucked tail, well defined white star on his fore-

head, and wonderful, gentle, trusting disposition. Will take good care of him until the owner calls for him.

DELIA MURRAY.

P. S.—Also a saddle.

But the owner didn't call, and a happy week slipped by, in spite of the hard work. An early canter while Patsy was still asleep made Dee feel refreshed to tackle the day's endless tasks.

The two lonely girls, who knew nobody west of the Mississippi, had traveled first to Tucson, but the places open to tubercular patients cost far more than Dee dared venture. So she had gone to a real estate agent and had chosen from his list by the simple method of selecting the ranch house with the lowest rent—and the use of the 1919 model Ford thrown in.

The charge of the sick child and the work of taking care of a house without gas or electricity, made an appalling sum total to Dee's inexperience. She worked valiantly, pouring her young ardor into her tasks, but it seemed to her that they were never finished.

If the meals were cooked, the chickens fed, the plants watered, the house tidy—then at night she would find that she had forgotten to fill the lamps and there wasn't a drop of kerosene in the house. The next day she would start her chores with the lamps, lay in her week's groceries, make something to tempt Patsy's appetite, and then dejected squawkings would cause her to remember she had forgotten to feed the hens!

Unk, she never forgot. He was held in trust and her first concern after her sister.

IV

ONE afternoon, when the chores appeared to be done, she treated herself to a ride toward the Mexican border. Unk was fresh and eager and they had gone for miles across a desolate bit of country with nothing in sight except an occasional jack rabbit, when he suddenly stopped short, sniffing suspiciously, his ears back.

"It must be a rattlesnake," thought Dee, somewhat frightened, scanning the low growth of mesquite and greasewood.

Could that be a human being—that bundle of clothes by a clump of mesquite? She dismounted and hurried to the spot. A Chinaman lay huddled there, too spent to go farther. When she spoke, he opened his eyes feebly and gasped:

"Water!"

Dee held her canteen to the sufferer's lips, letting a trickle go in slowly, then waiting, and presently giving him a little more. When he had revived somewhat, she helped him on Unk and turned toward home.

It was a weary way, but Dee walked along steadily, leading Unk. In the latter part of the journey she saw the Chinese slipping, as if unable to keep his balance, and then Unk had to carry double.

When the tired trio reached the house it was already dusk. Patsy called out in wonder:

"Oh, Dee, now you have a laundryman for wash days!"

But the reticent Wong became far more than laundryman; he was cook, butler, housemaid, chauffeur, gardener, general utility man—in short, what is invariably described by housewives as a perfect treasure. The flowers in the window boxes, brought so carefully from Tucson, never wilted for lack of water, the lamps shone, the meals were on time, and even the Ford was kept so clean that the casual observer might have mistaken it for a 1921 model.

He asked astonishingly low wages; all he seemed to want was a home. His especial care was Patsy, who began to gain steadily as a result of the delicious food he prepared.

Dee exulted over Pat's steady improvement; Unk, ridden daily, kept in fine condition; summer waned and everything was serene at the white bungalow.

One morning, when Dee had gone off in the Ford to a ranch where figs were ripe, Patsy heard some one coming at a canter. She was all excitement when a man swung himself out of the saddle and strode to the porch. He did not look surprised when he saw the sick child, for so many come for "the cure" in the sunshine of Arizona.

"Hey, there, kid! Heard over to the store that you had a chink cook. Anywheres about?"

"Wong 'll be here in a minute. He's curryin' our horse and when he makes him look all pretty and shiny, he brings him around here for me to see."

"Now don't you be scared, kid. I ain't goin' to hurt you. I'm an officer, an immigration agent—get that? Immigration. This chink stabbed another down in Cananea and slipped across the border."

Patsy's voice trembled with indignation, not fear. She did not know fear.

"Stabbing? Sticking a dagger right into a person's insides? Wong wouldn't do such a perfectly awful thing any more than you 'n' me. He's never been in Canaan—that's in the Bible, and he's—a heathen."

"You bet your last buck he is," returned the man. Patsy thought to herself that his eyes looked exactly like a pig's, although that wasn't a polite thought to have about one's company. "Anybody else about? Any hombre? How did you get out this way?"

"Just me and Dee live here, and she's gone out in our car. When I got sick, Dee brought me out here from Tucson. It costs lots of money to live in Tucson, don't it? You see, we're orphans and we won't get the money grandpa left us till we're twenty-one, and Dee isn't but twenty, so now all we have is the come-in. Is it come-in or income? I can't remember."

"Most generally it's outgo," returned the man. "Gee whiz, but you're some talker! Now be quiet while I have a little powwow with your chink. There he comes with the horse. Don't be scared, and just keep your mouth shut to see how it feels!"

Why should she be scared on her very own porch? It was such a funny idea that Patsy grinned cheerfully. But how queerly the man with pig's eyes was acting, for as Wong appeared around the corner of the porch, leading Unk, the man walked straight toward him, sticking a pistol right at him!

Wong put up both hands over his head and held them there. Unk stood quietly at Wong's right, eying the stranger furtively.

"Don't you hurt Wong!" screamed the child in terror, but the man paid no attention to her. He was saying strange, snarling things to Wong:

"Thought you'd make a get-away, damn yer yaller hide! Where'd you hide the dope?"

Wong said something that Patsy could not hear.

"You can't pull the wool over me with that damn lie!" the white man growled. "Didn't know it was snow? Maybe you thought it was a box of toothpicks I was payin' you to take across? None of that bull about somebody stealin' the box!"

He stuck the pistol against Wong's ribs, and continued his verbal threats:

"You gotta come right back with me to Nogales and show me where you cached

it, or I'll put a bullet in you. Get on that horse and ride in front of me to the store. Had to leave my car there. And if you let on I ain't an immigration agent, I'll stop your clock."

Sheer terror held Wong petrified, his arms taut above his head.

"You skunk, didn't y' hear me tell you to get on that horse and be quick about it?"

Unk backed away, still eying the newcomer distrustfully. With his left hand the man jerked hard on the neck strap, and Unk hated a rough touch, even from a familiar hand.

His ears back, the whites of his eyes gleaming, the horse lunged forward and fastened his powerful teeth on the stranger's wrist.

In the sudden, agonizing pain, the man dropped his pistol, and Wong grabbed it.

To the frightened child watching, it was amazing that now it was Wong who pointed the pistol and the pig-eyed man who held his hands over his head—one of them dripping red. Wong backed the stranger to his own horse and kept him covered until he mounted and rode off.

"I'll get you yet, damn yer!" the white man shouted back.

When Wong came back to Patsy, his oriental face was as imperturbable as ever.

"He velly bad man, missy," was his only explanation. "He my boss man, and I lun away."

V

As soon as Dee returned and heard Patsy's excited account of the morning's adventures, she re-cranked her Ford and hurried over to the store to see if she could gain more particulars.

The storekeeper was brimming over with news.

"Sure, I know all about that stranger now," he declared. "He's a dope smuggler named Karp, but he had me fooled tellin' me he was a special immergration officer, huntin' a chink who had slipped across the border. Seems somebody had stole a package of coke from this Karp and he thought your chink was the boy. He burned the breeze comin' after him, for there was a narcotic agent on his own trail. The agent grabbed the old snowbird right here and took him to jail. Some lively doings around here to-day and some cussin'—believe me! Mighty had bite your cayuse gave him."

The Arizona newspapers carried headlines

about the capture and featured the horse for his well-timed attack on the smuggler.

"It sounds exactly like Unk to me," said Captain Dabney to Captain Burton when he read the story. "He always snapped if anybody yanked him like that. I believe I'll take a look at this T-Bar brute."

"I think you were well rid of Unk," returned Burton. "That bronc's a flat tire and a total loss."

At the ranch, Patsy had begun to walk around the yard fifteen minutes every morning and afternoon. Next week it was to be twenty-five minutes. She took up a calendar to figure how long a walk she would be taking by New Year's and the problem was so difficult that a shadow darkened the page before she realized that any one was there. Looking up into the face of a young man in uniform, she gave a cry of incredulous delight:

"Oh, you've come!"

It wasn't the greeting he expected, for Captain Dabney was by no means in his best humor. He had stopped at the store to ask about directions, and had learned that a horse with a flat saddle had strayed into the T-Bar Ranch in the early summer. It seemed curious to him that the people who lived there, whoever they might be, had made no effort to find the owner except pasting up that notice in an isolated store. The long ride in his roadster, over sandy roads alternating with rocky ones, had not put him in a happy frame of mind to meet the ranchers, and he was unprepared for Patsy's lavish welcome.

"And you've got spurs and golden hair! I think you're lots nicer than a prince."

With undisguised admiration she gazed at Dabney's carrot-colored hair, which in his entire life had never before received a word of praise. He hastily put back his cap.

"Is your father at home, little girl?"

Patsy sighed in deep content.

"You want to ask him to marry my sister? It's dreadful we haven't got a father, but he died when I was little and so did mother, and grandmother's way back East. I guess you'll just have to ask Dee."

"What a funny kiddy you are!" laughed Dabney, the truculent note gone from his voice. "Your sister any older than you?"

"Of course she is," answered Patsy impatiently, "or how could you marry her?"

Dabney hastily changed the subject. "Tell me something about yourself."

All Patsy needed was a sympathetic ear, and she began gayly to chronicle every event of their lives since they came to the ranch. Through the whole story, Dee's courage and tenderness gleamed like pure gold.

"Bet she's the noble type and homely enough to stop an eight-day clock," Dabney opined sagely to himself.

A few minutes later he had the opportunity of judging.

VI

DEE came riding up on Unk, her face aglow with health and color, her eyes blue and clear and joyous. Dabney whispered hurriedly to Patsy:

"Not one word about the reason I'm here. Our secret!"

"I'm Captain Dabney, Miss Murray," he added, bowing gravely. "Your small sister and I have had a wonderful talk. Hello, there, Unk! You showed more sense in running away than I thought you had."

Dee's candid face clouded.

"Oh-h, he's yours?"

"Not at all. He's yours, by the right of his own free choice."

"That isn't the way," Patsy interposed eagerly, "you got it all wrong. You must say: 'Fair lady, accept this ro-an steed.'"

Dabney caught up his cap and made a sweeping bow this time which would have done credit to a pirate captain in a musical comedy.

"Fair lady (that's easy, brother officers!) I pray you to accept this (Patsy, I'm a cavalryman and not even for you will I call that horse 'roan') little bronc."

"Of course, I can't possibly take him from you, Captain Dabney, though it's marvelously generous of you to suggest it. But you see—"

Here Unk created a diversion by rubbing his head against her arm, probably to remind her that she had forgotten the sugar she had taught him to expect when they returned from a ride. The girl's arm went impetuously around his neck.

"You darling!" she cried. "I don't see how I can accept you as a gift, and I don't see how I can live without you!"

Laughing and confused, her color bright, Dabney thought her the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"Please listen to some plain logic," urged Dabney. "It was a good thing for me that Unk went to you. I had a slight

fracture and when the arm healed I started to work on a new pony—handy, courageous and strong, but still a little slow." The polo enthusiast was speaking, even as the first Persian player waxed hopeful over his pony two thousand years ago. "If I can put a little more speed into him—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Patsy, startled by a sudden whinny from Unk. "It sounds zactly like he was *laughing!*"

Neither of the two grown-ups paid the slightest attention to her. They were wholly engrossed with the possible virtues of the new polo pony.

VII

So it was not surprising that Patsy finished her "cure" at Captain Dabney's

quarters—a Patsy growing round and rosy and active.

The wedding had been at the little bungalow, with the abundant mistletoe of Arizona making whiteness indoors. Patsy was an ecstatic small maid of honor, and Dabney's brother officers came over in sufficient numbers so that the bride might walk under the glittering line of crossed sabers, after the army custom.

But Unk's name jarred upon Patsy's sensitive ear. No wonder he had run away when treated so disrespectfully!

"I'm going to call him 'Uncle.' I think it sounds lots perliter. I wish everybody in the post would, too."

And, in the friendly fashion of post life, everybody did!

A BALLADE OF DISILLUSIONMENT

Love's scholar, I, this many a year,
Deemed all the ways of love I knew,
But one experience most dear,
Belovèd, I have learned from you;
That love must end is nothing new,
What fills my heart with sad surprise
Is this: that, as we part, we two—
The scales have fallen from my eyes.

Of old the face I lost more dear,
Still lovelier, in memory grew,
And yet at whiles I brush a tear
For days long vanished like the dew,
For love still beautiful and true
That death and distance still defies:
'Tis different as we bid adieu—
The scales have fallen from my eyes.

How far we are that seemed so near,
How strange that I made such ado,
Scarcely a week ago to hear
That you were false, could even sue
For mercy, love's poor residue
Glad of, and begging even for lies:
What veils I must have seen you through!
The scales have fallen from my eyes.

ENVOI

Princess, 'tis this that makes me blue:
That you it is, not love, that dies;
Never can I your charm renew—
The scales have fallen from my eyes.

Richard Le Gallienne

Go West, Gunman, Go West!

HORACE GREELEY NEVER DREAMED THAT HIS WISE ADVICE
WOULD BE ACCEPTED BY A PILGRIM AS CASE-
HARDENED AS SIMMIE THE DUDE

By Louis Weadock

SIMMIE THE DUDE, a professional gunman, *en route* to California to kill a man he never had seen, sat on the observation platform of the Limited, smoking a gold-tipped cigarette and wishing, with all the heart he had, that he had stayed in New York. The magic beauty of the Arizona night touched him not.

"They ain't enough electric lights out here in the wide open spaces," said this undersized, undernourished, flashily dressed young thug. "Them oversized stars look like they might easy fall on a feller. There's too much outdoors. It gives me the gim-micks. It's kinda lonesome-lookin'. Ain't it the truth, gentl'mun?"

"Hell, no," drawled one of the two large and impressive, although carelessly dressed, men who had been eying the superior New Yorker much as two mastiffs might regard a too dainty Pekingese. "It ain't half as lonesome-lookin' as New York on a Sunday afternoon. Am I right, warden?"

"Absolutely, judge," said the other large man respectfully.

"Anyway, it's kinda chilly," contended the critical gunman, snuggling deeper into his plaid overcoat.

Neither of his hearers troubled himself to defend the weather. Simmie the Dude was relieved. Never a fluent talker, even among his own kind, he was less at ease when trying to talk to a judge and a warden. Only homesickness had made him try.

That for which he was homesick was a four-dollar-a-week hall bedroom in a rooming house in West Forty-Fifth Street, a speak-easy or two, a stuss game, and the companionship of a few other shifty-eyed young men with whom his only other excursions from New York had been made.

These excursions, a few of pleasure to Atlantic City and a few of business to the Canadian border, comprised all the traveling this twenty-two-year-old son of the pavements had done until the leader of his gang had handed him two hundred dollars and a round-trip ticket to Los Angeles.

Until that day, Simmie the Dude had made an exciting if precarious living, guarding rum runners from their sleepless foes, the hi-jackers, at the New York end of the underground smuggling route. Never had he killed anybody, never had he even shot at anybody. So he had been not only flattered but surprised when English Harry had chosen him to go to Los Angeles, there to report to a man who would tell him the name of the man he was to kill.

"I guess it's some hi-jacker or squealer," English Harry had said. "But what's the odds who it is? You'll have a nice trip."

Listening to the judge and the warden congratulate each other upon the wave of law enforcement that was sweeping the West, Simmie reflected that the trip might not turn out to be so nice after all.

"All this talk about juries convictin' without leavin' the box gives me the willies," the restless pilgrim said to himself. "I wish Mamselle 'd show up."

Guardedly he glanced at a thin watch which once had been the property of a more honest but less careful man.

"That movie dame must have cleaned up the feed bag by this time," he concluded hopefully. "Maybe she'll let Mamselle come out for a mouthful of fresh air."

II

In the drawing-room of a Pullman, three cars ahead, Millie Mills, the loudest-voiced

star in the silent drama, was digging the last of her ice cream from her cantaloupe and saying to Mamselle, her maid:

"I feel like a wicked woman to sit here and eat, when I just know that my husband's in trouble. Mark my words—if everything's all right when we get into Los Angeles to-morrow, I'll quit believing in hunches! But everything won't be all right. These premonitions I've been having ever since we left New York mean that Daddy's in danger. Getting a telegram from him at every stop doesn't cheer me up a bit. That man would wire good news from his deathbed."

She finished the final spoonful of ice cream, and went on:

"No, siree, bob—Daddy's on thin ice. And I'll bet all the hock-rocks I own against this empty cantaloupe that it's got something to do with that bootlegging racket he let himself get talked into. It's got me worried sick—that's what it has."

"Mr. Jerome is a smart man. He won't let himself get hurt," insisted Mamselle, a red-haired, wholesome-looking young woman in a black dress with white collar and cuffs. "Shall I ring for the man to take away the dishes?"

"Yes," said Millie Mills, taking up a sheaf of telegrams. "And then get out for awhile. I want to think, and I never can think when anybody else is around. Of course, except Daddy. Now, with Daddy—"

But she was not talking to Mamselle so much as to herself, and she went on with her eulogy of Daddy even after Mamselle had disappeared.

A hearty, outdoors person was this Mamselle—one upon whom the troubles of others rested lightly; one upon whom her own troubles weighed no more heavily. Appearing upon the observation platform, which still was occupied by the judge, the warden, and Simmie, she filled her lungs with the invigorating air, bestowed upon the three an inclusive smile, and, in the voice of one who has lived much in the open, remarked:

"Greetings and salutations, gents! Ain't this a peach of a night?"

"Fine!" corroborated the warden.

"Fine!" concurred the judge.

"Kinda chilly," demurred Simmie the Dude.

The look of impatience which sprung into Mamselle's frank and fearless blue eyes made Simmie realize that his weather report

had been a social error. But this realization came too late, for Mamselle had dropped a carefully tended hand upon the brass doorknob.

"I thought they kept the observation platform steam-heated," she said with scorn. "I guess I'd better mush back to my igloo."

"Aw, Mamie!" blurted out the lonesome gunman, with a show of feeling that surprised himself.

Getting to his feet and simultaneously getting out of his plaid overcoat, he stepped toward her.

"Put on my bennie and keep yourself warm," he begged.

"Fair enough," said she, wrapping herself in the vivid garment and sliding into a canvas chair. "When the ice goes out of the river, you're a regular Sir Walter Raleigh, aren't you?"

"I don't know the guy," was Simmie's answer. "But take this chair. It's more comfortable."

Obligingly she transferred herself to the chair he held out for her. From it she raised entranced eyes to the heavens.

"You know what I'd like to do?" she inquired, addressing the universe in general. "I'd like to put a running W on one of those stars and bring it down."

"A running W?" repeated the judge in tones of astonishment. "What's a girl like you know about roping steers?"

"A girl like me knows plenty and then some," modestly replied Mamselle. "My father's a cattleman, and I was raised in a saddle."

Beaming upon the warden, the judge demanded:

"Now, isn't that fine?"

"Does a man's heart good to meet a real woman," declared the warden.

"What's a running W?" queried the puzzled New Yorker, determined to retain his standing in the community, even at the risk of breaking his lifelong rule against admitting that there was anything he did not know.

Nobody enlightened him. The judge and the warden were absorbed in their contemplation of the cattleman's daughter, and the cattleman's daughter was absorbed in her contemplation of the stars.

III

"SOMETIMES I wish I'd stayed on the range," she said at last. "Sometimes I

wish I hadn't gone to Hollywood to be an actress."

Desperately anxious that the quartet should not shrink to a trio and leave him on the outside, the lonesome gunman again injected himself into the conversation.

"I didn't know you was stage-struck," was his unhappy contribution.

Upon him the girl turned the wonder-filled eyes with which she had been regarding the stars.

"But I wasn't," she said patiently. "I was work-struck. I found I couldn't act worth shucks. But even though I lost my idea of being an actress, I didn't lose my idea of eating. I'm as good as any top-hand that ever threw a leg over a bronc, but the number of steers there are to ride herd on in Hollywood is comparatively none. To get my three hots and a pad, I went to lady's-maiding. If I do say it myself, I'm all right at that."

"I'll say you're all right at anything!" declared Simmie the Dude, his boyish eagerness breaking through his specious mask of hardness. "I'll just bet you are!"

So genuine was this impulsive outburst that Mamselle, catching her breath, stared at him with startled eyes. Those eyes still were searching his when the judge, achieving a palpably artificial cough, arose and nudged his friend's ankle with the judicial foot.

"Warden," said he impressively, "the court will now withdraw while *Helen* burns the topless towers of Ilium."

"Keno!" concurred the warden, and followed the thoughtful jurist into the car.

Simmie's sigh of relief was deep and sincere, but a puzzled look still lingered in his eyes.

"Say," he asked a little sheepishly, "who's this moll *Helen* he was talkin' about?"

"*Helen*," said Mamselle, her eyes shining, "was the wife of *Mr. Menelaus*. *Paris* ran away with her, and started the Trojan War. You've heard of Troy, haven't you?"

"Soitunly!" he assured her. "It's the burg next to Albany. But the rest of th' junk is all Greek to me."

"It's all Greek to all of us," she smiled indulgently. "Anyway, what do *we* care?"

Emboldened by the emphasis she had placed upon the pronoun, Simmie, with an awkwardness which would have surprised certain twists and broads on Fourteenth Street, essayed to take her hand. When it

eluded his predatory fingers, he pretended that he merely had been reaching for a dropped cigarette.

"You smoke too much, and you don't get enough exercise," she said critically. "A year on a ranch would make a new man of you."

"I ain't sick," he protested, "an' I ain't no cowboy. Lil ole N' Yawk is good enough for me."

"You've never been on a ranch," she accused.

"An' I've never been in jail," he lied. She made no comment, and he continued: "If a ranch is such a swell dump, why didn't you stay on one?"

"I'm going back," she announced joyously. "Just as soon as I get Miss Mills settled in her house in Hollywood, I'm going to pull up stakes and head for Bar Z Ranch. It's only a couple of hundred miles from Los Angeles. If you don't like the bond business in Los Angeles, you might come out and let dad give you a job."

"Gee, I *would* like to be around where you are," he confessed, making another attempt upon her hand.

This time she permitted him to capture it. Very gently he held it as the train rolled on, while he sat silently fighting down a temptation to tell her that the only bonds he knew anything about were bail bonds, and that he was not a bond salesman, but a gunman. It was not the memory of the many guns that had got into trouble by talking to women that deterred him. It was his conviction that if he did tell the truth, she would take away her hand.

"I don't suppose that a bond salesman knows much about bootleggers?" she inquired at last.

"I've heard of 'em," he replied modestly. "Why?"

When she finished telling him, he was silent for a space before he said slowly:

"If I was your boss's husband, I'd hire me a bodyguard."

"They're always men, aren't they?" she queried.

"Sure thing!" said he, surprised. "Bein' a bodyguard is just about as soft as bein' a target in a shootin' gallery. It ain't no job for a skirt."

"I can't see why," she insisted. "I know I could draw quicker and shoot straighter than any man on our ranch."

"Gollie," he pleaded, anxiety in his voice, "tell me some more about that

ranch. And for the love of Mike, leave out the hardware. Talkin' about cannons is bad luck."

More than an hour later, when his arm was about her and her head was on his shoulder, he uttered a few words which would have fallen strangely upon the ears of English Harry.

"I'm offen N'Yawk for life," said he. "Soon's I clean up a little deal in Los Angeles, I'll have enough dough to get married on. Then it 'll be you an' me for the ranch."

IV

SIMMIE's letter of introduction to Tug Wilson, the wholesale bootlegger, whose negotiations with English Harry had brought English Harry's henchman three thousand miles to commit murder, was half of a playing card.

He lost no time in presenting it. For now that Mamselle had promised to marry him, he was doubly anxious to do his job, get his money, and make his get-away.

"One grand ought to give us a good start," he told himself in the taxicab that carried him from the station. "With the five hundred this guy Wilson has to put in my mitt when he shakes hands with me, I'll stake Mamselle to some clothes and a couple of rings. With the other five centuries he slips me when the work is done, we'll go to housekeeping on the ranch. Step on it, kid."

This audible injunction to the chauffeur might not have been necessary had not Simmie the Dude been trying to make up for time he had lost at the station. There he had been delayed by the exhibition of emotional acting given by Millie Mills.

She had called, "Daddy! Daddy!" and no Daddy had answered the summons. "He's dead!" she had shrieked. Not once, but many times, and each time louder than the time before.

Simmie the Dude had been pleased to see the cool efficiency with which his *fiancée* had soothed her half hysterical mistress. But he had not been pleased to see the two detectives that his experienced eye discovered in the crowd that was being edified by Miss Mills's wifely solicitude. Only his loyalty to Mamselle had given him sufficient fortitude to remain among those present until Mamselle had shepherded Millie Mills into a limousine.

Not until that limousine had rolled away

did the gunman get into the taxicab. After he had ridden eight or ten blocks, he got out of it. As soon as it was out of sight, he got into another. The second set him down before a small and respectable-looking hotel in a side street.

When he registered as "William Jones, Chicago," he was shown to a room which the hard-faced clerk whispered had been reserved for him by Mr. Wilson. The deference with which the clerk spoke Mr. Wilson's name gave Simmie the impression that this Mr. Wilson was a person of consequence—an impression which was confirmed by the respect shown by the bellboy by whom the gunman sent a sealed envelope to the bootlegger.

This envelope held one-half of a torn nine of spades. By air mail English Harry had sent the other half to Tug Wilson. Simmie the Dude knew that not until Tug Wilson fitted the torn halves together would there be a meeting of principal and agent. He devoted part of the period of waiting to the loverlike employment of telephoning to Mamselle.

"When we got home Mr. Jerome was here," said that young woman in a crisp, businesslike voice wholly unlike the soft drawl with which she had enchanted him on the observation platform. "He hasn't been out of the house for three days. It hasn't been safe."

"Gee, that's tough," condoled the sympathetic gunman. "Ain't there nuthin' I can do?"

"He doesn't need a bond salesman. He needs a bodyguard," remarked Mamselle. "I've told him so, and he wants me to thank you for making the suggestion."

"Tell him for me he's entirely welcome," replied Simmie the Dude, so warmed by this evidence of appreciation that he forgot that his particular line was supposed to be bonds, not bullets. "Here's some more info you can pass him. Tell him if he packs one of his gats in a shoulder holster and the other in a coat pocket, he can get 'em out quicker. Tell him to keep away from windows, and always to sit with his back to the wall and his face to the door. Tell him if he's out at night to walk wide of trees and alleys. Tell him—"

"You know too much to waste your time peddling bonds," she broke in eagerly. "The bond business doesn't need you half as much as Mr. Jerome does. You jump in a taxi and come out here and go to work."

"I can't," he protested. "I'm waiting to see a man."

"Wouldn't you just as lief look at me?" she coaxed.

"The man ain't the only reason," he assured her nervously.

"You aren't gun-shy?" she asked incredulously.

"That's it!" he exclaimed gratefully. "I'm gun-shy."

Patting the automatic in his pocket, he congratulated himself upon the sagacity he had shown in confessing that he was not of the stuff of which bodyguards are made. For if Mamselle thought he was afraid of firearms, he could remain in the service of Tug Wilson until he had killed his man and collected the thousand upon which to rear the fortunes of Mamselle and himself. Yet when Mamselle spoke again he knew he had congratulated himself too soon.

"I'm sure sorry you're leary of shooting-irons," she said. "I'll cure you of that when I get you down to the ranch. But I'm not leary of them. I was born with a six-gun in my hand. I'm going to take that bodyguard job myself."

"You are *not*!" he cried excitedly. "I won't let you."

"You're not my husband yet," she reminded him.

"Say, listen to some common sense!" he begged.

"I can't listen to anything just now," she replied placidly. "I've got to go. You can call me up later if you want to, but I'm going to ring off now. Miss Mills is having another fit."

He would have called her up then and there had not Tug Wilson walked into the room.

Wilson was a large and impressive man, expensively tailored, pungently scented, heavy of jowl, baggy of eye, and with a forthright method of doing business.

"Your first five hundred," he explained in a hoarse voice, as he handed some bills to the uneasy gunman. "You'll get the other five the day you deliver the goods. English Harry told me he'd send me a party that could turn this trick without expecting me to hold his hand. You look as if you might be such a party."

"If I ain't, I stand to lose five hundred bucks," snapped Simmie the Dude, his thoughts elsewhere. "All the help I want from you is the name of the party you want bumped off."

"You're nervous," commented Tug Wilson, "but that's all right with me. I've seen lots of nervous race horses."

"T'll with the race horses," said the gunman sharply. "Who's this guy I'm goin' to croak?"

"You high-priced killers are worse than prima donnas for temperament," sighed Wilson. "The party you're going to croak is named Jerome."

"That's all I have to know," said Simmie the Dude, his face impassive as he opened the door. "On your way out, will you tell the clerk that a prima donner up here wants a taxicab right away?"

V

Mr. and Mrs. Horace Cuyler Jerome, *née* and now Millie Mills, lived in an imposing mansion whose exterior had appeared in more than one motion picture. In one film it played the part of "the royal palace," and in another it represented "the Newport residence of a wealthy millionaire." A judicious blend of the Venetian and the soda fountain schools of architecture, it still was less versatile than was its mistress. Because, while in all the parts it played it bore the same gay and festive front, the gifted Millie Mills was capable of at least three separate and distinct characterizations. To cause her to change her expressions of countenance all that her directors had to do was to call for No. 1, No. 2, or No. 3, as the case might be.

Yet, versatile as was this mobile lady, her husband was the real chameleon of the family. He had tried many ways of getting rich quick, and for having tried some of these ways he himself almost had been tried. A lineal descendant of an enterprising but unethical promoter, whose business card once read, "Anything there's a dollar in," he had larceny in his blood.

The flimflam films in which appeared his beloved and loving wife were produced with what Mr. Jerome referred to as "sucker money." He knew sucker money when he saw it. Whenever he saw it he went after it. Often he caught it; for, although he took many chances, he made few errors.

But, even in Hollywood, it is a long primrose path that has no turning. Mr. Jerome—who, while other producers were making bigger and better pictures, did his best to take bigger and better boobs—changed his luck by the infallible method of playing another man's game. Not content with con-

verting to his own use all the unsophisticated capital he could find, he had aspired to become the Napoleon of the wholesale bootlegging industry. It was then that he had met his Whiskyloo.

The bootleggers' commanding officer, Tug Wilson, fearful that Mr. Jerome, having fought and run away, might live to fight another day, and having no island where he could provide the No. 2 Napoleon with bed and board, had decided to make a good Indian of him by making him a dead one.

"The guy soittunly lives in a swell hut," said his executioner to himself, as the third taxicab in which he had ridden since leaving the hotel stopped a block away from the pink palace. To the chauffeur he said: "Keep the motor running, kid."

Waiting at the door, which was flanked by marble symbols of "Peace" and "Plenty," Simmie the Dude sought to allay his uneasiness by remembering that when, before entering the third in his relay of taxicabs, he had telephoned to Mamselle that he was on his way to see her, she had interposed no objection. True, her manner had been somewhat lacking in cordiality, but to Simmie this was understandable upon the ground that she still was under the impression that he was afraid of firearms.

It was not of firearms that he was in fear as he cast wary glances up and down the empty street.

"Suppose I been tipped off?" he was saying to himself. "Suppose somebody has rapped to me? There never was a job yet so air-tight that there couldn't be a leak. I may have to fight my way out of this jam yet."

These gloomy forebodings hung heavily upon him until the door swung open, and Mamselle, her eyes shining with happiness and her voice again the delicious drawl which had bewitched him on the train, stuck out her hand, man-fashion, in greeting.

"Come on in," she said coaxingly. "Mr. Jerome is just dying to meet you."

"I ain't dyin' to meet him," he countered uneasily, his mind busy with the problem of the change which a few minutes had wrought in his *fiancée*. "I come out here to tell you somethin' private and confidential. Do you want to hear it?"

His brusqueness impressed her not at all.

"Miss Mills and her husband want to hear it, too," she replied, with a dazzling smile. "Come on in."

Puzzled and ill at ease, he followed her

into a hallway whose furnishings reminded him of an art store which he and another collector once had visited after business hours. His uneasiness had not hindered him from noting that the right-hand pocket of Mamselle's fresh white apron was occupied by a small but businesslike automatic.

VI

THE Fourth Avenue hallway led to a Louis XIV drawing-room, where from the depths of an immense gilt chair a bald and shrewd-looking man, considerably older and immeasurably better dressed than Simmie, inquired blandly:

"Surely you aren't surprised to see that we've taken your advice and armed ourselves to the teeth?"

"Daddy!" protested Millie Mills, who, all in black, as if in readiness for any contingency, sat on a gilt stool beside her husband's chair.

She had been crying, yet neither her moist eyes nor the dry, appraising eyes of her languid husband, interested Simmie the Dude so much as did two objects which lay on a lacquered table within convenient reach of the husband's hand. One was a telegram, the other a forty-five caliber blue steel revolver.

But this interest was not reflected in his face as he accepted the gilt chair which Mamselle selected for him from the Jeromes' almost unlimited stock of gilt chairs. It was reflected in his hands, for after he seated himself he slipped each of those hands into a side pocket in his coat, there to infold the stubby butt of an automatic.

"Well," asked Mr. Jerome pleasantly, "how's the bond business?"

"Fair," reported the conservative gunman, somewhat grudgingly.

"Only fair?" sympathized his host. "I call that bad news. But it's good news that you're anxious to get out on a cattle ranch."

"Not what you'd call anxious," corrected Simmie, thawing under the other's friendliness. "Willing."

"With a wonderful girl like Mamselle," volunteered Millie Mills, erecting pathetic eyes, "you will count it a blessed boon to aim high for love."

"Yes, ma'am," coincided Simmie the Dude.

"Speaking for myself," observed the unsentimental husband of the sentimental lady, "I would prefer to do my aiming,

either high or low, for love rather than for one thousand dollars."

There followed a long moment of silence, during which Mr. Jerome regarded Simmie with a look of unadulterated benevolence. Neither the look nor the silence contributed in any way to the peace of mind of him whose hands were full of deadly weapons.

So intent was the stare with which he studied the older man that he appeared to be oblivious to the fact that he and the older man were not alone. So taut were his nerves that when Mamselle touched him lightly on the shoulder he sprang up, backed swiftly against the wall, and, with his hands still in his side pockets, swept the room with startled and suspicious eyes.

Open-mouthed and trembling, Millie Mills stared at him, panic-stricken. But her husband's emotions were under better control. Although his eyes did not leave the gunman's face, his bland expression remained unchanged. Its serenity was undisturbed either by the gunman's outbreak or by the sheepishness which succeeded the gunman's defiance when Mamselle broke the tension with a laugh.

"It was only me, you big baby," she said to the killer. "I wanted to remind you to tell us what that private and confidential stuff is all about."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Jerome suavely, when he saw that his guest appeared to be reluctant to tell anybody anything, "our friend will admit us to his confidence should I read him this telegram."

He extended a delicate hand toward the yellow sheet that lay under the revolver, but checked his hand when Simmie the Dude snapped:

"Don't touch that gun."

"I'd like to see anybody stop me from touching it!" declared Mamselle, stepping the short distance that separated her from the table. She pushed the weapon unceremoniously to one side and handed Mr. Jerome the telegram. Turning to the nervous gunman, she remarked: "It doesn't cost a penny to sit down."

Awkwardly he resumed his gilt chair.

"This telegram," said Mr. Jerome, eying his guest with unshaken good will, "arrived from New York only a few minutes before you were good enough to pay us this friendly call. I regret that I am not at liberty to disclose the name of the gentleman who has so kindly sent it."

He paused, but Simmie said nothing.

"I shall read that part in which I feel you may be interested," the host continued. "It runs: 'Five feet eight inches; eyes brown, hair black, cut one week ago; weight from 150 to 155; lobeless ears, knife scar left cheek; number—' No, I won't read what follows."

"You've read plenty!" burst out the original of this sketchy but accurate description. "What's the answer?"

"That depends entirely upon you," sighed Mr. Jerome. "But before we go any further, I wonder if you will not satisfy my pardonable curiosity as to whether your future plans include making Miss Mills a widow."

A low sob from Miss Mills indicated that she could see herself in the part.

"There, there," said Mamselle, comforting her. "I take my oath that if you're made a widow I won't be a wife."

VII

For only a fleeting instant a beaten look appeared in the face of Simmie the Dude, but that instant was long enough for the watchful Mr. Jerome to take advantage of it.

"This telegram," said he, carefully folding it, "comes from a man whom you regard as a friend, a very good friend."

"A fine crook to have for a friend!" exploded the gunman, his eyes shifting to Mamselle, upon whom they lingered. "Just wait till I get back to N'Yawk! Just wait till I—"

"You are not going back to New York," broke in the decisive Mamselle. "You're going right down to the ranch with me. You won't find that kind of friends down there. Down there we wouldn't give New York house room. No, nor Hollywood, either."

Mr. Jerome coughed delicately.

"I would look upon it as an honor to be permitted to make a little wedding present of a thousand dollars," he murmured. "Provided, of course, that Miss Mills's widowhood is indefinitely postponed. Upon that subject our friend has not yet expressed his views."

"I'm the one that's got the views," announced Mamselle, silencing with a stern look her vacillating *fiancé*, who had progressed only so far as "I—I—" "We're glad to get it," Mamselle concluded.

"Not half so glad as I am to give it," responded the benefactor gallantly, his smile

expanding as if to keep pace with some secretly amusing thought which was unfolding itself in his mind. "I am beginning to think that my pleasure is so great that I shall be selfish not to share it. Yes, I shall notify Tug Wilson to add a thousand to my thousand bucks."

"You'll what?" gulped Simmie the Dude, amazed. "Why, I got five hundred of his dough in my pocket right now that I got to kick back with."

To Simmie the Dude Mr. Jerome paid not the slightest attention; but, beaming upon Millie Mills, he said:

"Darling, I congratulate you. The gentleman has just made up his mind not to kill me."

When "darling" had finished kissing

him long and fervently, she wound a black silk arm around his neck and purred, kitten-like at his ear:

"Daddy, you know Tug Wilson said he would never bother you if you'd only stay out of the bootlegging business. Why don't you tell him you will?"

"Darling is dense," said her fond husband, capturing her hand and beginning to play with her rings. "After this I'm going to devote myself to the production of pictures."

"Goody! Goody!" ecstatically cried Millie Mills. "Who're you going to get to bank roll 'em?"

"I haven't fully decided," murmured Mr. Jerome; "but I wouldn't be surprised if it was Tug Wilson."

FOR A BEAUTIFUL DEAD LADY

THE loveliest face, the bravest heart, the most romantic girl,

Beauty's own desperate lover, suddenly goes—

About her April head the snows of winter whirl;

April forever, she could not wait the rose.

Impatient for the summer, she has gone,

Leaving behind her a long year of dreams;

She is away—of all her lovers none

Might catch her raiment—by the mountain streams

Listen for her, or 'mid the dryad trees

A gleam of her fled beauty may be there,

Or in the music of old elegies

Mourning the death of ladies like to her.

Most beautiful lady, can this news be true

That Death at last hath gathered even you,

To his dark bosom taken your flower of flowers;

Triumphant, haughty head, romantic laughing brain,

And were you, too, the victim of the hours

That take all from us and give not back again?

This loss of you—oh, if you could but hear!—

Is far beyond the limits of believing,

Beyond the ominous porches of the ear,

Beyond our tears that scarce believe their grieving.

Oh, many flowers down there in Hades be,

Thief of the world, that ever takes the best,

Fondles in darkness, but none so fair as she,

Of all lost lovely ladies the loveliest,

Dimming the brows of Queen Persephone.

Belovèd, toward your still and shadowy place,

Here in a world all lonely for your face,

We stretch our arms—in faith to find you yet

By the wild power of love that never shall forget.

Richard Leigh

Au Naturel

THE MAN-EATING TIGER IS SAID TO HAVE NO SMALL VICES.
BEWARE, THEN, OF THE LADY-KILLER WHO
HAS NOT A SINGLE BAD HABIT!

By Mella Russell McCallum

THERE are ways and ways of refusing a cocktail. For instance, Karl Devlin might have spread out his hands in smiling helplessness, and murmured something about doctor's orders—or he might have intimated that he had, in the course of the day, had enough—or he might even have smiled a "The cup is not for me, but God bless you all the same!" sort of smile.

But when Bart Gordon, the host, brought the tray into the living room, Devlin shook his head unsmilingly, and stood aloof while the rest drank their orange blossoms.

The men, feeling the blight of a teetotaler in their midst, became slightly more noisy. The women reacted in just the opposite way, and were for the moment damply subdued.

Then the three married couples and the extra man got into the three cars, and were off to the country club to dine and dance. Nancy Gordon, as hostess, took Devlin into the back seat with her.

He was a newcomer in the vacation colony of New Dorn. But because he was brother to the popular spinster and good fellow, Ann Devlin, he was automatically welcomed. Ann, abroad for the summer, had loaned her house to him.

"Don't be too nice to Karl," she had warned Nancy. "He's frightfully spoiled."

And so, of course, Nancy had proceeded to be extremely nice to the handsome, blond bachelor, and had ignored the warning, as a married woman always ignores advice from an unmarried girl.

During dinner in the low-ceiled, chattery club dining room the cocktail episode was forgotten. The guest sat between Nancy Gordon and Kit Blackwell, and talked interestingly about the coast, whence

he had just come. His manners, Nancy noticed, were beautiful. He was more attentive than the husbands about passing things.

"You'll find us married folks very dull, I expect," Nancy told him. "It's a pity my daughter isn't grown."

"Your daughter? But you're not old enough to have a daughter."

Nancy laughed. "Dorine is eight. And Kit's and Fanny's children are still younger. But we'll introduce you to some nice girls."

"Have all of you children?" Amazement blended into a delighted smile on Karl Devlin's face. "How delightful. I—somehow I hadn't supposed it of you."

"And may I ask why not?" demanded Bart Gordon, in a tone that made Nancy nervous.

The guest shrugged. "So many moderns don't, you know. But I think it's fine."

Nancy flung out a little laugh to cover up Bart's "Humph!"

"Yes, my girl is eight," she repeated. "And Kit has two boys, who'll be empire builders some day, if they don't kill each other in the meantime. And Fanny, there, has adorable twins, baby girls."

Karl Devlin continued to beam, bestowing his approval on each young matron in turn. He smiled on Kit, whose black curls and manner were compared to Jane Cowl; on sensible, placid Fanny, with her steady gray eyes, and her severe blond bob; then back to Nancy, who was sometimes called a light brunette and sometimes a dark blonde.

"How delightfully natural that you should all have children," he said with a hearty emphasis.

The three husbands looked annoyed.

Then Kit's husband, Bucky Blackwell, the one with the owl glasses, began an argument about four-wheel brakes.

Under cover of the talk, Devlin whispered to Nancy: "But you can't have a daughter of eight. It isn't possible."

Nancy felt her color rise under her rouge. Bart had left off paying that sort of compliment. The stranger was looking straight at her, and she had never seen anything so undilutedly blue as his eyes.

When the music started, Devlin at once asked Nancy to dance. She looked across at Bart. Her husband was not making a move toward the marital prerogative of the first dance. Bart had a deceptively casual look, which she understood to mean that of course, *of course* his wife would dance the first with him.

Why couldn't Bart speak up? This wifely business of eternally going more than halfway was getting on her nerves. She gave the dance to Devlin. Half a minute later she saw Bart saunter out of doors with some men.

Her brows drew together. She knew what that meant. Those men would give Bart a drink, give it to him "neat"—perhaps two. Bart couldn't stand much liquor.

Then she postponed the problem, as women always did when they were dancing with Karl Devlin.

"It's a treat to see a woman with hair," Devlin was saying.

"I'm the only woman in New Dorn not bobbed. Kit and Fanny think I'm crazy. My husband says he would like me to have it cut."

"Oh, don't! It's so beautiful, so natural. And it happens to be the color I like best in hair. Sort of dark sunshine—like your eyes. Only I suppose your eyes are commonly called hazel."

"Aren't you afraid you'll turn my head, Mr. Devlin?"

"Not your head."

All in all, it was a pleasant dance.

She danced with Bart next, and his breath confirmed her fears. But when she complained about it, he said, "Well, why didn't you give me the first dance, then?"

As if it were up to a wife always, to keep a man out of temptation! Really, a husband expected too much.

Karl Devlin was dancing with Kit Blackwell, now. Kit's shiny black head gleamed under the lights. Nancy wondered what

Kit would say if she knew Devlin had complimented her unbobbed hair.

When the music stopped suddenly she saw that Kit's black eyes looked a bit dreamy. Nancy smiled to herself. So Kit felt the spell of his dancing, too.

Then Devlin danced with Fanny; and Fanny's husband, Redge, who was placid and sensible, too, looked on, while the other men temporarily exchanged wives.

During the long intermission they all went out on the veranda and had soft drinks. Bart gave Nancy a cigarette, but neglected to light it. She turned to Devlin for a match.

"I'm sorry, I don't smoke," he said.

Bucky Blackwell gave her a light. She remembered, now, Devlin hadn't smoked. She wondered if he had a weak throat. He didn't look it.

"Let's walk down the green a little way, Mrs. Gordon," Devlin suggested. As they started away, Bart called: "Don't forget the next dance is mine, Nancy." His tone was aggressive and possessive, which was nice and likable, and going a generous halfway for a husband. Nancy felt a little sorry about that first dance.

"I'll be back," she promised.

The close-cut green held a weird, theatrical look in the moonlight. Straight ahead lay a black fringe of woodland. To the left a church spire over the hill caught the light fantastically.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Nancy sighed.

"It is, indeed," agreed the man in a deep, appreciative voice.

"But you aren't having a good time, Mr. Devlin."

"Pardon me, but I am."

"You don't approve of your sister's frivolous friends."

"I am not my brother's keeper."

"Why don't you smoke?"

"Because it's an unnatural habit that can't possibly do me any good. An insidious habit, that grows on one like drink, only not so devastating, of course."

Really, what a terrible man, thought Nancy.

The opening wail of a blues recalled them, and Nancy began to dance with Bart. She saw Redge introducing the guest to some girls. Well, it would be a good thing to be rid of him. He was a bit too much.

But Karl Devlin did not dance with either of those girls. Redge looked disgusted, as, with the superb indifference of

a popular man, Devlin strolled out on the veranda alone.

As Nancy and Bart passed Fanny and Redge in dancing, Nancy heard Fanny say evenly: "Well, never mind, you did your best, Redge."

Bart was ploughing along with energy. Bart wasn't fat, but he was square and heavy. The shoulder of his coat was wet through.

"Well, how do you like the man with no small vices?" he observed.

"He's queer. Please don't hold me quite so close, Bart. It's too hot."

II

HUSBANDS were in New Dorn during week-ends and vacations only. Through the rest of the week the women superintended their household affairs, and children were allowed their innings. And there was bridge.

But now that Ann Devlin's brother was here, things were different. A man to be reckoned with all week! And he did have to be reckoned with. Nancy had supposed, and even hoped, that he would soon tire of married women, but he didn't seem to.

Every morning he went swimming with the three mothers and their children. He was wonderful at teaching children to swim. Already Nancy's Dorine adored him.

All the mothers could swim, but Nancy was the best by far. She was the only one who dared go out past the farthest float. Consequently she received more than her share of Devlin's beach attentions.

He was loud in his admiration of her strong, slow stroke. They got in the habit of going out a long way together, then climbing on the last float to rest a few minutes on their way in.

One morning, as they sat on the edge of the float, he said: "If you only knew how much better you look without cosmetics, you'd never use them."

"Really? But one can't go around on land without them."

"Why not? Your daughter doesn't rouge."

"Do you like to see a shiny nose?"

"Oh, a little powder—I don't object to that. But that red stuff you use! And black on your brows! You cover your natural beauty."

Without any of the red stuff on now, Nancy could only ignore the blood that rushed to her face. The man was not ig-

noring it. He was smiling faintly. "Well, shall we swim back now, Mrs. Gordon?" It seemed as if the commonplace suggestion was a floodgate holding back a host of pleasant, personal matters.

"We're all first names out here," Nancy said.

"Thanks, Nan-cy." His deep voice lingered on the word.

That day at lunch Nancy experimented. She came downstairs with nothing on her face but a little powder. No one was home but Dorine and the maid, so it was a good time to try it out. As she passed the hall mirror it did seem as if she looked better—more girlish, less set. Heavens, she didn't want to look *set*!

She went to a bridge luncheon the next day, and she went unrouged. She had debated about it all the morning. It would be exciting, to say the least, to see Kit's and Fanny's expressions when they saw her.

The three met in the hostess's guest room. Nancy swung around from the mirror, chuckling inwardly, rehearsing what the others would say. Fanny would grin slowly, and Kit would start with: "My God, Nancy—" But the chuckle died—for Kit and Fanny had also left off their make-up.

Then they all laughed.

"There's no use pretending that Karl Devlin hasn't been lecturing us separately," declared Fanny, sensibly. "Kit and I discovered each other last night. We were wondering if you'd be without."

"For my part, I think he's done us a service. We were dipping too heavily." Thus Kit, the doll.

"Won't it be fun to see the husbands' faces?" Nancy laughed.

And it was. When Saturday came, Redge raised his mild brows, Bucky blinked through his glasses, and Bart looked sardonic. Bucky quoted something about:

The weird sisters hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go *unrouged* about.

The men had brought up from town this week-end an extra woman, in the person of Redge's cousin Geraldine. Which, Kit confided to Nancy and Fanny, showed how desperate the men considered the situation to be.

But would the brother of Ann Devlin have the woman they gave him? He would not. He would have none of the fair Ger-

alda—none whatever. The reason was simple enough.

Redge's girl cousin had never heard of an anti-cosmetic drive. She was a sketch in high colors. Her rouge shamed the sunset and her black pencil the midnight. She had ears like Eva Le Gallienne—but there the resemblance stopped.

The husbands did their clumsy best. They were attentive to their own wives, leaving Devlin to the colorful Geralda. But somehow they kept finding Geralda on their own hands all the time, while Devlin would be dancing with one of their wives.

"If we had only known his taste for ghosts," groaned Bucky to Bart and Nancy, as he watched his wife floating past in Devlin's arms. "Geralda would make a peach of a ghost."

"I doubt if he'd care for her style, even without paint," was Nancy's soft-spoken opinion. "She's too unnatural."

"We're in bad with Geralda, all right," said Bart. "We promised her a man she'd like, and she says we've deceived her. Calls him a dud."

Nancy did not say "Sour grapes!" But when she danced next with Devlin she told him he was supposed to be nice to Geralda.

"Am I? Why?"

"To relieve you from married women."

"Don't you mean, to release married women, Nancy?"

She colored.

"Let's go around to the corner of the clubhouse and see if we can't find a pink rose for your hair." He broke off dancing and led her out.

The lights from the kitchen made it easy to find the roses. He chose a half-open bud, removing the thorns carefully, and adjusted it. Nancy had the sensation of being in a play—a play staged years ago.

Then suddenly he drew her into the shadow and kissed her.

They went back to the hall at once. But in that moment the feeling of childish make-believe had changed into something quite different.

III

"How would you like to motor to Warblink to-morrow?" Karl Devlin asked Nancy in an aside. They were having supper in the Blackwell kitchen on a Sunday evening.

"I don't think so. Bart wants the car. His vacation starts to-morrow."

Just then Bucky came up from the cellar with some of his homemade stuff.

"No, thanks," declined Nancy.

"No, thanks," Kit and Fanny echoed.

Bucky turned to Ann Devlin's brother.

"This is your doing," he said darkly.

"I swear it isn't," laughed Devlin. "Just because I don't take unnatural stimulation is no reason why these ladies mayn't."

The atmosphere was a bit strained. Nancy stepped calmly to the kitchen cabinet and put more mayonnaise on her sandwich. The husbands drank their cordial, or whatever it was. Bucky thriftily poured the three untouched glasses back into a gallon bottle.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to sit in a little game this evening, Devlin?" suggested Bart, speaking so smoothly that only Nancy caught the contempt.

"Why not?" smiled Devlin.

It was a men's game, over at another house. And it did not improve the situation one bit when Bart came in late that night with the admission that the teetotaler had cleaned them all out.

Nancy was in bed. She giggled.

"I don't get that virtuous lad of yours," snapped Bart. "Won't smoke, won't drink, won't let you girls rouge, and gambles like a veteran."

"There's nothing unnatural about gambling, is there?" murmured Nancy. She had been wishing all the evening that she could motor to Warblink with Devlin to-morrow.

She was not disturbed to find out later that he had taken Fanny motoring, or, to be exact, that he had permitted Fanny to take him. It gave her a private thrill to know that he had asked her first. She could afford to be generous.

All through Bart's vacation she watched with amusement as Devlin divided his attention between Kit and Fanny. Whenever he did speak to Nancy directly, she heard a special message. Whenever he danced with her she thought there was a repressed eagerness about him. Of course, she couldn't be sure. But she didn't want to be sure! Sure things were too tedious, always.

Once, as they danced, he told her that her hair needed a flower again: "A yellow flower this time. Aren't there some yellow flowers down by the brook?"

"Yes," she said.

And so a second time she walked across

the green with him to where the scrub willows bordered the brook.

"A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more."

he said, as, a second time, he put a flower in her hair.

"Don't kiss me," she said sharply.

"All right, child. I won't."

"Karl—Karl, I'm afraid!"

"Of course, you're afraid. If you weren't, you wouldn't be such a dear." He pulled her closer.

"No, no—"

"My dear child, why do you combat a harmless, natural impulse?"

IV

It would seem, after that, that she was definitely committed to intrigue. Horrid word! Misleading word, too. For there was no harm in it.

She knew, of course, that a married woman off guard is a target for flattery. But this was different. Her eyes were open. She wasn't going to make a fool of herself.

Really, it was very nice, having a friendship with a man again. It sort of filled a gap in her life. She hadn't been conscious of any gap, but there had been one, she knew now.

She thought about it as she went about her small activities—thought about it with a detached self, a Nancy that was not the real Nancy. Or was the new Nancy the real one, and the wife-mother-housekeeper one the detached one? Oh, well, it didn't matter.

She was with Devlin often—but not too often. She didn't always accept his invitations to go motoring in her car. But sometimes she went, and they would take sandwiches, or have tea at the inn near Warblink.

And afterward he would read to her under the trees back of the inn—poetry. And sometimes, as he read, she would let one of her hands lie in one of his. But not always—not always.

Sometimes the new Nancy would blot out the old entirely, and the details of her home would be jumbled together hazily. Then the voice of her child would strike through with a jar, and she would pull herself up. She knew all about these mothers who put their children second. She wasn't going to be one of them.

At other times it seemed as if she saw details more clearly than ever—as if her child was the most elusively lovely thing in the world, and her husband the most adorable old dear—as if her house was the prettiest place in town—as if the ocean was bluer than it used to be, and the pine-fringed town more picturesque.

Her friends, too, emerged at times with startling sharpness. And they were such charming, vivid, clever friends, all of them.

While she was in one of those moods of universal kindness, she expressed herself to Kit one day. She said: "Do you know, you're looking awfully well these days."

"Am I?" To Nancy's surprise, Kit blushed. Nancy and Dorine were lunching at Kit's. Dorine was playing condescendingly with the future Napoleons—who were really more like puppies than empire builders of the human world.

"Why weren't you at the Sackvilles yesterday?" Nancy went on.

"I was motoring with Karl."

"Oh!" Nancy did not at first recognize the emotion that flooded her for jealousy. "It was a gorgeous day to drive, wasn't it, Kit?"

"Yes. We went all the way to Warblink. I had some sandwiches along. Did you ever hear him read poetry, Nancy?"

"Oh, yes! He reads well." Nancy's throat was dry. Kit was blushing again.

As soon as she could get away she went home, leaving Dorine to play awhile longer. She sat down beside her bedroom window to think.

So! Sandwiches and poetry at Warblink, unchaperoned.

She was hurt, and she was angry. After awhile she became bitter. So that was all their friendship had meant. That was the sort he was.

But, speaking of sorts—what sort was she?

On the tail of that unpleasant thought, other thoughts began to fasten themselves in logical succession. By the end of the afternoon she wondered if she had not, after all, been the very thing she was sure she wouldn't be—a fool.

By the end of the second day she was rather sure she had been a fool. And by the end of the third she was calling herself one, clearly and disgustedly.

"Even self-confession is good for the soul," she said, mentally. And she began to settle down into her old self again. She

even laughed a little about it—but not much.

Naturally, now, her thoughts centered on Kit. By all the signs—which Nancy understood all too well—Kit was letting herself in for the same kind of foolishness. Sandwiches and poetry—how well she could see the picture! It hurt a little.

Bah!

Yet how could she be hard on Kit? Who was she to judge?

The humor of the situation was growing on her daily, and with it a healthy contempt for Devlin. She was thankful that she could summon a twinkle to her eye when she met him nowadays. He would never know how close she had come to being badly hurt.

But Kit! She didn't want Kit to run so close. What could she do about it? She didn't know. You couldn't go advising a person in a case like this. Words were such horrid things, like granite blocks, that lasted long after situations were dissolved.

And besides, if she were mistaken about Kit, she'd feel an awful fool, giving herself away, making Kit justly angry.

No, they must never engage in actual speech on the subject. What must be done must be done merely, not said. And for the present all she could do was to sit very, very quiet.

The more worried she got about Kit, the clearer she saw her own past idiocy. Still, it had been nice—

And there was another thing. She felt immeasurably more experienced. Perhaps on the whole, Karl Devlin had been—well, sort of educational. At least, that was a comforting way to look at it now!

She felt that now, at last, she understood that time-worn phrase, "a man of the world." A man of the world accepted diversion—and let it stand as such.

So would she, in her small way, be a woman of the world, and keep her bright, naughty memory on a safe shelf—not allow it to permeate her life.

If Kit were only like Fanny, balanced and unimaginative! But poor Kit was notoriously flighty. How could Kit come through unscathed, when she, who was much more sensible, had been fooled by a man flirt? There had been a rose and a primrose, and a kiss and another kiss—Well, several other kisses!

It began to look as if she would simply have to send some granite words flying into

the web of her friendship with Kit. She couldn't sit still forever and watch Kit skid. But first she would try feather words.

She dropped in at Kit's one afternoon just as Kit returned from an excursion with Devlin, and asked for some tea. She knew Kit wasn't any too glad to see her.

Kit would have liked a little time to herself before facing the world of children and tea things. Those two distinct worlds, Romance and Reality, need so many little bridges! As Nancy waited on the screened veranda she felt sorry for Kit.

Kit, brightly fluffed, came in with the tea cart. "It's so nice to see you, Nancy! Boys, do be quiet!"

The boys had each a small iron automobile which they were causing to collide around the leg of a table.

"When's Mr. Devlin going to bring me that tool-set he promised?" one of the boys demanded.

"Oh, do they say Mr. Devlin?" Nancy laughed. "With Dorine it was Uncle Karl."

"Do you take double sugar, Nancy, or is it Fanny?" The feathers had sailed by Kit.

"One lump."

Kit dropped in two lumps, and was about to drop a third, when Nancy cried: "Stop! I don't want sirup."

"What am I thinking of?" mourned Kit. Nancy knew.

"Sirup's bad," she went on airily. "Takes away the real kick."

"What kick?" Kit asked vaguely.

"Tea's like life, you know. Fill it too full of sweet and it dark-browns on you; but take it moderately flavored, and it's good stuff." Nancy thought that rather neat.

Kit's eyes opened blackly. "Nancy Gordon, have you been at Bart's cordial?"

No, feathers were no good.

The summer was on its last lap. Redge was the last husband to have a vacation, and every morning he and Fanny, Kit and Devlin, played golf. Nancy was left out, although Fanny and Redge tried valiantly to include her. Nancy didn't mind that. She didn't care to be near Devlin any more than she could help, not so much on her account as on Kit's.

When she did meet Devlin these days it was amusing to see him. He was a polite blank, a puppet without memories! Which also was educational—

Every afternoon Kit and Devlin would motor off together. And on dance nights they would get themselves talked about outside their circle. Except that one dance night Nancy saw, not Kit, but Fanny, walking across the green with Devlin. Nancy slept better that night than she had in a long time.

But the next day Kit and Devlin went motoring as usual—and Nancy was as worried as ever.

She decided, finally, to speak right out. And she would certainly have done so had not Devlin suddenly gone away on business.

No one seemed to know when he would be back, or if he would be back. If Kit knew, she was not saying.

V

THE squeak of a brake rent the calm September evening. Nancy, alone in her living room with a book, started. People in New Dorn didn't stop cars like that. Then followed the toot of a horn, Kit's, sharp, insistent. Nancy rushed out.

"Nancy!" Kit's voice, guarded.

"What on earth—"

"Come—get in!"

"But Dorine—"

"Isn't your maid there?"

"Yes, but—"

"Get in, I tell you!"

Nancy got in.

"Look out for Angus," she warned Kit. Angus was the town policeman.

"Damn Angus! Reach back for my sweater and put it on."

Nancy argued no more. When a person acted this way there was some good reason for it.

Already they were out of town, under the viaduct, upon the highway that led to Dorn Junction, where the New York express stopped for passengers.

"Can't explain—not time—just take my cues—and don't be a dumb-bell!" screamed Kit above the engine.

Fifty-one—fifty-five—fifty-seven! What was Kit thinking of?

Suddenly Kit slowed up, and they fell back into a crawling forty, thirty-five, thirty. Kit was peering out around the windshield. Twenty-five, twenty. The brakes again.

Nancy saw a woman walking at the edge of the road, and she was carrying a small bag.

Then Kit's voice trilled out, gay and natural:

"Well, of all things, if it isn't Fanny! Young woman, what do you think you're doing—reducing?"

There was a small silence, then Fanny's voice, oddly forced: "Oh, hello, Kit!"

"Nancy and I called around to take you for a spin, it's such a heavenly night," Kit raced on. "Got to do something, you know, without a man on the horizon. Jump in, Fanny. Nancy, lean forward."

Nancy leaned, and, after a perceptible hesitation, Fanny climbed into the back seat of the coach. Kit gave Nancy a sharp kick. Nancy racked her brain for speech.

"Aren't you afraid, walking out here alone?" she demanded. It didn't seem the right thing to say, but she could think of nothing else.

"Oh, no! I often do it." Fanny's voice sounded decidedly wan. Nancy had half turned around, and the light from a passing car revealed Fanny's cloth suit instead of her flowered sports coat. Nancy faced front sharply, sick at heart.

"Well, where shall we go, girls?" chattered Kit. "To Amesbury, for a soda? I could use one."

"No, thanks," said Fanny sharply. "I was walking to get rid of indigestion. R-really, if you don't mind—I'd rather get out and walk again."

But Kit was sliding into high speed again, not so high as before, but a steady forty.

"I wish some one would tell me why that Devlin man had to leave us in the lurch this way," complained Kit, pinching Nancy.

"The brute," said Nancy.

"Just as he was beginning to make such adorable love to me, too," Kit wailed. "I declare, he got me spoiled. Say, did he make love to you, Nancy?"

Nancy breathed in hard: "Say, is water wet?" She and Kit laughed loudly.

But from the back seat came silence.

"Well, we may as well be thankful for what we have received, I suppose. He kept us out of the nursery." Kit swung evenly around a curve.

"And the nice part of him was," Nancy added, "you could let him make love, and still feel perfectly safe!"

"Yes," Kit agreed. "Still, I wouldn't fancy telling Bucky."

"Would Bucky mind? I don't believe

Bart would. Because, you know—a kiss is such a natural thing!”

Again Nancy and Kit went off in a peal of laughter.

It all sounded natural, too.

“It really is quite wonderful the way he can tell you you’re the only woman who has meant anything to him in a spiritual way,” Kit mused.

“Show me the woman who doesn’t fall for that, and I’ll show you a corpse!”

That was a good touch!

“I—I wish you’d take me home, Kit. I—really feel—awfully ill—one of m-my bilious attacks—” Fanny certainly did sound ill.

“You poor thing!” said Kit. “Do you want me to get you something at a drug store?”

“No, no—take me home!”

Kit backed into a farm driveway and headed for New Dorn.

Nancy hoped Kit wouldn’t talk any more. It seemed as though she had said enough to make the point.

They slid along silently.

Just as they were nearing the town a long drawn out sound came across the farm land—the New York express whistling for the junction.

“Shall we help you to bed?” Nancy asked, as they reached Fanny’s house.

“Just let me alone!”

“All right,” said Kit, and she dimmed her lights so that no one could see Fanny’s cloth suit and the bag.

Left alone with Kit, a wall of consciousness sprang up between them. Kit had been wonderful, so far. But now!

Kit drove slowly around the block to Nancy’s door.

“Lucky we found ‘her,’” Kit observed. “She might have been awfully sick all by herself out there.” And that was all Kit ever did say about it.

“Yes.” Nancy climbed out, stiff from strain. “Good night, Kit.”

Oh, Kit was marvelous!

VI

ANN Devlin, square, tailored, breezy, was back from Europe, and they were having Sunday night supper in the Blackwell kitchen. Ann was complaining loudly.

“As if it wasn’t enough to use my house all summer, and not stay to thank me! But what does the wretch do but take with him some of my volumes of poetry!”

Kit, slicing bread thinly, caught Nancy’s eye. Nancy twinkled. Their eyes slid along to where Fanny stood beating French dressing. They had never found out how Fanny had really come through. They couldn’t tell a thing from her face, now, for she had on a good layer of protective pink like the rest.

Nancy wasn’t helping with the supper. Spying a pack of cigarettes on a shelf, she selected one and lighted it.

“What, smoking?” exploded Bart, as the husbands came up single file from the cellar with various jugs and bottles. “You should have seen the girls this summer, Ann. Your confounded relative had them bewitched.”

“Oh, I know. Karl’s hopeless, as well as graceless. I hope he didn’t bore you. Give me a light, Redge.” Ann settled her broad figure in one of the yellow painted chairs, and inhaled comfortably.

“He didn’t bore us. We got quite a kick out of him,” said Kit.

How good it felt, Nancy thought, to be able, like the violet, to blush unseen once more. But she did wish Fanny would say something.

“We’re really very much obliged to you, Ann,” Bucky beamed. “Your brother amused the girls no end.”

Again Nancy’s and Kit’s eyes slid along to Fanny. But Fanny was absorbed in adding chopped onion to the dressing.

Bucky was messing at the sink, with advice from both sides. At last he poured his latest mixture into the cocktail glasses. “See if you don’t like this, girls. I call it ‘*Quelques Fleurs*.’”

They all raised glasses.

“Wait! A toast! We ought to toast your brother, Ann. Who’ll propose it?” Bucky was having an awfully good time.

“I will!” It was Fanny speaking. Nancy’s heart skipped. She dared not look at Kit.

“Hear, hear!”

“Let’s have it!”

Fanny stood quietly, her sleek head high, a light in her gray eyes.

That light bothered Nancy.

A light in the eyes can mean so many, many things.

But when Fanny spoke there was no more doubt.

It was the voice of a woman who sees things in perspective and is not rebellious.

“*Au naturel!*”

Across the Border

NOEL MEAD, TWO-HANDED FIGHTER AND GENTLEMAN, FINDS
THE ROAD TO THE LAND WHERE LOVE DWELLS

By William Merriam Rouse

THE black-eyed girl at the road house was calling him, heart to heart, as Noel Mead set up his snowshoes in a drift at the cabin door. His mittened hand drew back from the latch, hesitating. Supper, and a long evening alone by the fire, or the Broken Knuckle and the sweet little singing voice of Mary Bessette?

"Come along, *mon chéril*
Come along with me!
Come along, *mon chéri*,
Au café Paris!"

Almost he could hear her singing her own queer little songs; *chansons* of Canada which she had brought down across the border, and the best of the things that had been new on Broadway six months before. Yes; with a smile lifted as though for something far and far beyond the smoke-filled room, and the drifting smell of bootleg and the hearty, raw talk of the lumberjacks.

A lonesome fool, he called himself; a fool for having started to survey a great Adirondack estate without a gang, or at least a rodman. When a man carried a transit over his shoulder all day, spilling himself in the snow a dozen times between daylight and dark, he did not want to spend every evening alone.

It was not an occasional evening at the Broken Knuckle, with lumberjacks and bootleggers and mysterious white-handed men from the city, that worried Mead. Mary Bessette! And the thrumming of his heartstrings when her little feet darted like pink butterflies over the tobacco-stained floor. Black hair and pink dresses: no wonder they worshiped her at the Broken Knuckle.

It must be the weather that had got him to-day; soft gray sky, growing darker, and now toward night little feathery flakes that came drifting down once in a while to tell

those who could read sign that a big storm was on the way. For the big storms sometimes got ready like this: easily and slowly until the heavens opened and let forth snow and darkness and a wind that ripped and drove and flattened. It was all right if a man knew what was coming.

II

THE spruces and the hemlocks were black against the mountainsides. Black and white and gray the world had become in the late afternoon; and only the near pines showed dull green. Warming up and getting ready; it could not be more than twenty below zero now, by the feeling in the air. Mead shook himself and went into his one-room cabin; it was contrary to all common sense for him to go down to the Broken Knuckle.

Snowshoes were left outside so that the rawhide would keep firm, and the transit was placed carefully in its corner inside. There were a few coals left from morning in the ashes at the bottom of the box stove.

Mead pulled off his Mackinaw shirt, of red and black checks, and stood straight and long and lean in the semidarkness. A young man heavy in the shoulders, but with no weight to carry anywhere else; bred to the mountains, with long range blue eyes and a crop of weathered brown hair.

He started supper and sat down to wait. It was comfortable here: the walls were well chinked, and he had a deep bed of balsam in the bunk built at one end of the room. A dozen books were on a shelf, and a hinged table was available for working and eating.

Mead had settled his body for the winter, but his soul would not be still. It would not rest since he had tried to beat out of it the feeling that there was another

and different Mary Bessette within the one who sang and danced at the Broken Knuckle.

He was eating by candlelight when he heard the click of the wooden latch lifting. Only a close friend, an enemy, or an outlander would enter like that, without knocking. His hand moved along the table toward his hunting knife as he looked up; and then he sprang to his feet, staring with unbelieving eyes at the figure that had come in out of the gathering night.

III

A TALL young woman in whipcord breeches and a short, sable-lined coat, was standing with her back against the door; a hand still keeping hold upon the latch while she searched his face with wide gray eyes. Mead had never seen a girl so beautiful: bands of pale, gleaming hair showed beneath her sable cap, framing an oval face strong in spite of delicate curves. Her lips were full, but firm and sensitive; and from the gray eyes courage shone steadily.

"You are Mead?" she asked, in a soft, rich voice. "Noel Mead, the surveyor?"

"Yes!" He smiled, and pulled a bench forward. "I'm doing some work here for Berkeley Stafford, of New York. You—surprised me for a moment. I seldom see any one, even a trapper, here. Won't you sit down?"

"I'm Dorothy Stafford." She moved to the bench and sat down, pulling off her heavy gloves. Mead saw a ruby which even his inexperienced eye knew for a thing of great value. "My father isn't here?"

"Why, no! It was understood that I'd send my report to him in the spring!"

"Indeed!" She spread out her hands and looked at them thoughtfully. "I may as well tell you—I've been at Lake Placid for a few weeks of winter sports. Day before yesterday father telegraphed me to meet him here in your cabin. I don't understand it at all!"

Her glance had been appraising the cabin as she talked; now it came to his face. She was no longer doubtful of him; he could read that.

"Mr. Stafford must be on the way," said Mead. "How did you get here?"

"Why, from the railway station I hired a man to drive me to the nearest inn; the man seemed to be expecting me. At the inn they said I'd better stay there all night, and that they would give me a guide in the

morning. But—well, I didn't like anything about the place. I had my snowshoes with me, and so, after I'd found out which way your camp lay, I just slipped out of the inn and started alone. I suppose I was foolish, but—to tell the truth, I was frightened! There was something sinister about the place!"

"The Broken Knuckle!" breathed Mead.

"I don't know the name of it. A red-haired man with one eye brought me in from the station, and he seemed to own the hotel."

"Reddy Godahl! Yes, it's no place for you!"

"But father must be here somewhere, and he would not have arranged—"

"I don't know that your father is here," interrupted Mead. "And I'm sure he never sent Reddy Godahl to meet you! Maybe, just maybe, he never sent that telegram! Where was it sent from?"

"I think it came from Montreal. He said he'd had to make a business trip to Canada, and that he would stop here on his way back to New York."

"That's it! I'll bet a month's pay he's in New York now, and that he wasn't in Canada at all!"

"But why?"

"I don't know why. I do know that there are some bad characters working along the border—chinks and dope and hijacking. Yes, and worse. It's a good thing you had a chance to get away from the Broken Knuckle. They probably thought you were helpless in the woods."

"They might be planning to get some money from father," she said, meditatively.

"That's probably it. You'd be worth a small fortune to kidnapers!"

IV

SHE laughed, but without mirth, and shrugged. Mead watched her as she threw off her heavy coat and tossed it to the bunk—a thoroughbred.

"Some one will suffer for this!"

He was surprised at the steel in her voice; it would certainly go hard with Godahl and his sidekicks if anything could be proven against them. This girl would see to that. Mead thought her father would be the same, from what he had seen of him.

"They'll fade away when they find they've lost you," said Mead. "Across the border or into the mountains."

"Do you mean to say that the police can't get them?"

"Perhaps not," he replied, with a smile.

"They will if they can, but there's many a wanted man who has lived to a hearty old age in the back country."

She turned to warm her hands at the stove, and Mead caught her sidelong glance at his supper of ham and beans and camp bread. She was too proud to ask. He smiled as he brought an extra plate and a cup.

"You're hungry. I'm sorry I didn't think of that. But it was strange to see a woman come in out of the night, with a blizzard starting."

"Thanks!" She waited for him to place a bench for her. "You live alone?"

"Yes. With work to do it isn't so bad."

"Alone," she repeated thoughtfully, with her great gray eyes upon him. Now for the first time they seemed to consider him a human being, with a hint of personal interest. "You have no one to talk with? For weeks? Months?"

"Oh, yes! A trapper now and then, hunters, the boys at the Broken Knuckle. The lumberjacks are good fellows. It's only Godahl's crowd that's bad."

Her glance wandered to his books. She ate in silence. Mead thrilled to her; a woman of a world he knew and did not know. He had read about it, and he understood it to a certain extent, but it lay beyond his actual experience.

He knew that he might be capable of entering it, with money and a little smoothing at the corners. Yes; if he made good here, perhaps Stafford would give him a bigger job; up and up in the world.

A swift, subdued rattle swept across the window nearest the table. These were wind driven pellets of snow; and the white frost was creeping up the panes inside. The blizzard had come.

Mead felt the pull of the wind against the cabin, now that he thought of it. It did not matter much to him; except that the girl would have to stay until the weather cleared. He was glad; she was giving him a vision of another world. Ambition stirred within him.

They talked casually, at intervals, as he cleared the table and washed the dishes. She sat watching him speculatively, smoking a cigarette from a little gold case. He knew that he was something strange to her; a man of good manners, who spoke well

and yet was not of the life she understood. Except that he shaved every day, he was outwardly the same, from shoe-packs to hair-cut, as a lumberjack.

V

It was after he had finished work and lighted his pipe that the door latch rose and fell with a sharp clack. That was not the wind.

Mead crossed the room swiftly and swung the door open cautiously, with his shoulder against it on account of the wind, and his feet ready to spring. He did not expect trouble, but a wise man opens a door at night with care.

A snow incrustated bundle fell into the room, and rolled against his feet. A human being—a woman—Mary Bessette!

The pain-stricken eyes, staring up between muffler and cap, told him that it was Mary. There was torture in their black depths and a glaze over the surface.

She was snow from head to foot; her breath had turned to ice upon the muffler and the little strip of face that was visible dripped as if with tears. He knew how eyelids freeze down in the face of a blizzard; and how aching fingers thaw them out, only to freeze again.

"Mary!" He drove his shoulder against the door and stopped the blast that was tearing into the cabin. Then he carried her to his bunk. Muffler, jacket, moccasins; he flung them away as fast as he could get them off.

Tiny stiff fingers and small bare pink feet were illumined in the candlelight; there was no frostbite on feet or hands or face. Another ten minutes and it might have been very bad; she had put on her outdoor clothing over one of the light dresses that she wore in the superheated Broken Knuckle.

A little whimper of pain announced the agony of returning circulation, and Mary curled up in the bunk like a sick kitten. Mead groaned aloud in sympathy, and rubbed her fingers; it was there that the pain would be.

Her white teeth sank into her lower lip. He pressed hard with his palm against the tangle of black curls. There was a moment of silent battle, and then she sat up, smiling through tears which still lay wet upon her cheeks.

"Oh, Noel!" she cried, in the happy little voice that dripped music upon the hearts of men. "It's a hell of a night!"

At the sound of a step Mead turned; he had forgotten all about Dorothy Stafford. Now she stood at his shoulder, looking down upon Mary Bessette, with her ivory cigarette holder poised, and one slim hand in a breeches pocket.

The glances of the women met in thrust and parry, with honors even. Mary looked up at Noel, and her eyes softened.

"Reddy Godahl is coming after her!" She nodded toward Miss Stafford. "He's bringing Tinker Smith and Joe Tolman with him. Short of murder they mean business, and if the Tinker gets drunk enough he'll shoot!"

"I thought they'd let it drop!" exclaimed Mead. "Are you sure they're going to take a long chance like this?"

"Sure? Do you think I'd come out to-night if I didn't know? They'll hold her for fifty thousand, and they'll get it unless something slips. This thing has been framed for a long time, but I didn't know it until to-day."

"May I ask who you are?" A line of perplexity creased the forehead of Dorothy Stafford.

"I sing and dance at the Broken Knuckle, where you came to-day," replied Mary, with a smile flickering around her mouth.

"Oh—and you've come to warn us! I shan't forget it, I assure you!"

Suddenly Mary went white and began to slip forward from the bunk, clutching at Mead's sleeve. He threw an arm around her.

"What's the matter, Mary? Water, Miss Stafford! Quick! She's going to faint!"

"Not me!" Mary leaned against him with closed eyes, holding hard with both hands. "The Tinker took a shot at me as I got away—my shoulder!"

VI

HER shoulder was wet to his touch. In the dim light he had not noticed a dark stain growing over the shoulder blade.

Mead ripped away the fabric and found a little furrow plowed across the white skin; not much of anything after he had it properly dressed and bandaged, but that wound had been painful and bleeding through the girl's five-mile battle with the cruel night.

The round, fair arm of Mary Bessette gleamed bare in the candlelight; her velvet

shoulder was scored. A lion of anger stirred within Mead, and growled and stretched for an awakening.

"What are you going to do, Noel?" asked Mary, when she was herself again, fully dressed and drinking a cup of hot tea.

"I'm not sure," he answered slowly. "It wouldn't do Miss Stafford any good for me to start shooting. They'd get me, and then her. So that's out. We can't travel to-night. They hold all the aces. It would be sense to compromise."

"Yes," agreed Mary. "Godahl has got more nerve than I thought. He wins."

"Just what do you mean by compromise?" asked Dorothy Stafford, coldly.

"Offer them ten thousand to call it off."

"Certainly not!" Her tone was like the cutting edge of steel, keen and hard and cold. "You coward!"

"Take that back!" Mary Bessette was blazing in front of Mead, facing the other woman; her eyes seemed like disks of jet laid against white paper. "If they kill him, or beat him up and take you, it'll cost fifty thousand! And if anything slips you'll be dead—or you won't want to come back! You fool!"

"Haven't you forgotten the police?" Dorothy Stafford was now a little uncertain, a trifle frightened, and very angry.

"Never mind, Mary!" said Noel. "Miss Stafford, I'll do what I can for you. How much that will be I don't know."

"I'm sorry if I misjudged you." She spoke to him repentantly, but for Mary Bessette her eyes were filled with smoldering sparks. "You must admit that I've had reason since—ah—Miss Bessette came to change the opinion I had formed of you!"

"I un'erstan', me!" cried Mary. In moments of stress her English pronunciation blurred a little, and the language of her native Quebec came welling up. "But I am nothing at all to *monsieur! Rien du tout! Mademoiselle*, in the convent it was said 'Evil to him who evil thinks!'"

"How dare you!" A flare of anger shook the poise of Dorothy Stafford. "Good Heavens! I wish I had never come to this border country!"

Suddenly, Mary Bessette smiled; color came back to her cheeks, and her little laugh tinkled in the cabin. Her moment of rage had passed like a summer storm.

"It is a strange country, this border,

mademoiselle! Me, I have cross' the border into a country that you do not know! Yes, I have walk' with bare feet over the sharp stones of that border!"

Dorothy stared; and Mead knew that she did not understand what Mary was saying. His eyes met Mary's eyes; they understood each other.

He pulled himself back from that understanding. He was a fool. Behold the two women! A tall and slender lily and a little wild rose—what silly things a man would think!

Noel was astonished at himself; at what he had just seen and heard. Never before had he known Mary to be angry. Here he stood, like a phantom of a man, seeing a strange dream; with danger and perhaps death beating through the night toward him.

He stood here and thought thoughts he would not have spoken aloud for more than the wealth of Berkeley Stafford. Reason was all against it, but he knew that Dorothy Stafford looked upon him with eyes which held something more than the interest of the common danger.

VII

A THUD came against the door; and upon the instant it burst open. An avalanche seemed to hurl itself into the cabin; with the three already there bearing back before its weight.

Three men were here in a storm cloud. One of the bent, white figures turned and barred the door; another fumbled with a rifle of frost and snow, wiping at his eyes. The third of them swept off his cap and mittens and held himself ready for battle. This was the fierce and malodorous Reddy Godahl; thick bodied and hard bitten. The patch that he wore where one eye had been was a blank cake of snow, but the good eye blazed at Noel Mead with the promise of battle and no quarter.

"Tell Tinker to set his rifle in the corner and get warm," said Mead, quietly. "If he wants to start shooting I've got a gun, too!"

Noel had stepped forward, in front of Dorothy and Mary. His rifle, with a full magazine, stood at the head of the bunk behind him.

The quick eye of Godahl saw this; he took the rifle out of the hands of Smith and set it against the wall. The first danger had at least been postponed.

For the next five minutes the enemy thawed themselves, with grunts and maledictions. They dug the snow out of necks and ears, and pounded caps and coats until the floor was white and the stove hissing steam. Tinker Smith passed a bottle to his allies, and when it came back to him he took a heroic drink. He was a raw-boned, powerful man, with a weak face and very small eyes.

A study in contrasts were these three. Joe Tolman was phlegmatic, heavy, menacing with a kind of animal cruelty. The intelligence of the combination lay with Godahl, just as he had the greater daring and ferocity. Tolman pulled ice from his mustache and grunted. The little eyes of Tinker grew bright as they stared at Dorothy, but Reddy Godahl measured Noel Mead to see how much of a man stood between him and the carrying out of his purpose.

"I know what's up, Reddy," said Mead. "Things went a little wrong for you, but now you've got us in a corner. We might as well talk it over."

"I don't have to talk!" swaggered Godahl. "I'll settle with Bessette later on, but the Stafford girl means money, and when the storm breaks she goes with us!"

"Mary Bessette is out of the argument, Godahl," Mead told him. "Also you've got to talk. Unless you want two or three murders on your hand! Do you, Reddy? They might get you some time! You know as well as I do that they won't forget Berkeley Stafford's daughter! Don't try to bluff!"

Noel stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out under his eyebrows at Godahl. Men and dogs of sense understand with whom they have to deal. The proprietor of the Broken Knuckle was not ready to risk killing Dorothy Stafford; moreover, there would be no money in it at all.

"All right!" growled Godahl. "Say we don't want to kill anybody! Then what? You know damn well we can beat you up and take her along!"

"Maybe the three of you can beat me up," replied Mead, "but you'll have to kill me or take me along, too, if you don't want a sheriff's posse and the State police after you! Yes, and the Canadian Mounted if you cross the border! You made a mistake when you let her get away from the road house, Reddy! Now talk business!"

"Twenty-five thousand," said Godahl,

promptly, "and we'll all move back into the mountains until we get it. Plenty of grub, and nobody lays a hand on the girl!"

"Ten thousand!" Mead smiled grimly. "I'll see to it myself that Miss Stafford and Mary are treated all right!"

Reddy Godahl took counsel with himself before he replied. Except for Tinker Smith, those in the room had kept silent, hanging upon the battle of wills between Mead and Godahl. The Tinker had gabbled a little to himself, and edged around behind the stove with no purpose that was immediately apparent. Mead concentrated upon Godahl, and paid little attention to Smith, considering him not yet sufficiently drunk to be dangerous.

VIII

WHILE Noel waited, looking into the eye of Godahl, for an answer to his offer, the sound of a slight movement came from behind him. A stifled cry followed, and then the patter of small, quick blows; a shuffle of feet, hard breathing. Mead spun around, and, in the instant that he did so, he knew that the explosion he had tried to avoid was at hand.

Tinker Smith, with his loose mouth twisted in a foolish grin, held Dorothy in his arms. She had flung her body backward from the waist and was beating upon his face with little fists which made no impression at all.

As Mead looked, and before he could move, Mary Bessette sprang forward. The Tinker swung one arm free, and with a clenched fist struck Mary in the mouth. She reeled, with a red stain widening upon her chin.

Noel leaped, and with his weight behind a straight driven arm, he hit the Tinker's jaw; he heard the bone snap. Smith crunched against the log wall. His eyes turned glassy, and he dropped there, limp and crumpled, and pawing feebly at the planks of the floor.

Mead was carried forward by his own impetus, but he knew without seeing that Tolman and Godahl were making for him across the few feet of space that separated them. His hand found the rifle in the corner, and he whirled, but there was no chance to throw a cartridge into the magazine. He barely had time to raise the weapon as high as his waist and drive the muzzle a handbreadth into the stomach of Joe Tolman.

The big man went down with a grunt, kicking, and Mead knew that he as well as Tinker Smith was out of the fight. But they were only skirmishers.

Mead would have found no honor in thrashing both of them at once; his real battle was to be with the silent, one-eyed man who was coming for him with the tread of a cat, and death in that greenish-brown eye.

The strength of Reddy Godahl was prodigious; he was his own bouncer at the Broken Knuckle, and the mountains had not produced a lumberjack so tough that Godahl could not throw him out. Mead knew he was lost if he let the other man close in.

He struck with the clubbed rifle. Godahl caught the blow and wrenched the weapon away, and laughed, and threw it down. Noel landed a volley of crashing blows, laid open the cheek of Godahl, and reached his chin, but without so much as rocking him upon his massive feet.

Reddy Godahl came on almost slowly, with his lips drawn back from big, yellow teeth. Mead bent to lift a bench, and in that moment Godahl caught him. They went to the floor together, locked and fighting for holds.

In the battles fought at the road house, nothing was barred; Noel felt a thumb reaching for his eye as he lay under the weight of Godahl. He caught the wrist, and for seconds they lay motionless, with all the strength that was in them pitted against each other.

A dim curtain began to descend over the consciousness of Noel. He thought he was lost; and then he perceived that something was happening.

A shudder convulsed the big body of Godahl; it went slack suddenly. Mead, gasping in mouthfuls of air, jammed the pressing face away from his own and saw what had happened.

Mary Bessette was hanging like a fox terrier upon the back of Godahl, and all the wiry strength in her small arms was pulling at the ends of a rope that she had passed around his neck. His tongue came out of a purple face, and he collapsed utterly.

Mead staggered to his feet, but not yet could he rest or breathe himself. Only when the hands and feet of the three men were tied did he permit himself to sit down upon the bunk, head hanging; with the

room whirling before his eyes, and every muscle in his body atremble. He saw Mary sink to a bench, limp, braced up by her arms. She had helped him until the last knot was tied.

IX

DOROTHY STAFFORD was standing by the table, looking over in his direction with eyes which had become as bright as stars. They looked steadily upon him. He drew himself up and smiled.

She brought a drink from the water pail and held the dipper to his lips; he let the water run down his throat, oblivious to everything except that grateful coolness.

A moment later Mead stood up and shook himself. Faintly, Mary smiled at him from her bench; he gave her water and felt of the bandage upon her shoulder to make sure it was still in place. She pushed black curls out of the way with shaking, scratched hands, and got up unsteadily.

"I'd better fix the Tinker's jaw," she said. "He's whimpering over there in the corner like a sick puppy! It hurts him!"

She walked across the room wearily and knelt where Mead had dragged his three prisoners. He saw her begin to tear strips from her petticoat; then Dorothy Stafford was in front of him, speaking and looking into his face with eyes which had lost all their aloofness. They held respect: they greeted him as equal to equal.

"You—" she began, in a low voice. "You fought for me!"

"Of course!" Noel smiled. "It turned out all right, but—it might not!"

"I understand now." She looked down, and then straight at him again. "The way is open for you to—great things!"

Noel Mead looked beyond her at the torn dress and stooping shoulders of Mary Bessette. Mary was bandaging the jaw of Tinker Smith, who had crushed her mouth with his fist not fifteen minutes before.

Yes, the way to great things was open for Noel. He knew what Dorothy meant. Power and money and a high place in the

world; and something else was hinted in her eyes, if he proved himself and cared to take it.

Over there in the corner was little Mary Bessette, who sang and danced in a disreputable road house. And Mary, with bleeding mouth and gentle hands, was easing the pain of vicious, worthless Tinker Smith, who had struck her.

X

WITHIN the quarter hour Noel had crossed the border into the country of Mary Bessette. It was a fair country, and kind to its people. He knew that when time had lined the smoothness of Mary's face, and when the black curls were gray and lusterless, her kisses would still be like little flowers in the cool of the morning.

Noel had learned a wisdom that all men do not find; now he knew that love, not lips, made kisses. The spirit of Mary would blossom with the years.

"Yes," he said to Dorothy Stafford, "the way is open if a man can see it—and has courage!"

Then like a white light there came to him the revelation of a gift that he could make to Mary; here and now in the presence of this other woman. It would be greater than anything he would ever be able to give her later, no matter what possessions he might have.

He walked over to her and took her hands, raising her up. She smiled at him, wondering; and with his new understanding he read in her eyes that she expected nothing from him, nor ever had.

"Mary," he said, in a shaken voice, "will you marry me?"

She drew back with a quick breath, and stood trembling. Then she smiled again with her battered lips, and happiness filled her eyes.

"If you love me, Noel!"

"Mary," he cried hoarsely, "I have just learned love from you!"

"And I from thee, my soul!" she whispered, in her own language.

NATURE AND SORROW

I TOOK my sorrow into the mountains,
I bathed her lids in the crystal fountains,
I brought her stars to look upon—
And by and by my sorrow was gone.

Richard Leigh

Dogs Always Know

INTO THIS DIGNIFIED LOVE STORY HUGE CAPTAIN MACGREGOR
BARGES WITH A GRAND CARGO OF HUMOR TO
MATCH LITTLE LEROY'S DRAMATIC DOG

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

THE lovely little Miss Selby came from Boston, and the large and not unhandsome Mr. Anderson came from New York, and they did not like each other.

Indeed, Miss Selby was not very fond, just then, of any one who did not come from Boston. Sometimes she even went so far as to declare to herself that she did not like any one at all except the members of one certain household in Boston.

It was at night, after she had gone to bed, that she usually made this somewhat narrow-minded declaration, because it was at that time, when she was lying in the dark, that she would most vividly imagine that especial household. Her mother, her grandmother, and her two aunts; they were the kindest, wittiest, most delightful, lovable people who ever breathed, and she compared all other persons with them. And, so compared, Mr. Anderson came out very badly.

As for Mr. Anderson, the reason he did not like Miss Selby was because she obviously did not like him. He was a little sensitive about being liked.

He almost always had been, in the past, and when he saw Miss Selby's eyes resting on him, with that look which meant that she was mentally comparing him with her mother, her grandmother, and her two aunts, he felt chilled to the bone. Not that he looked chilled; on the contrary, his face grew red, and he fancied that his neck, his ears, and his hands did also.

He justly resented this. It was not his fault that he was sitting at her table. It wasn't her table, anyhow; purely by luck had she sat alone at it so long. It was the only place left in the dining room, and the landlady told him to sit there.

As he pulled out his chair he said, "Good evening," with a friendly and unsuspicious smile, and Miss Selby glanced up at him as if she were surprised to hear a human voice issuing from this creature, and bent her head in something probably intended to be a nod.

Naturally, he did not speak again. But, as he sat facing her, and with his back to the room, he could not help his eyes resting upon her from time to time, and it was then that he had encountered that chilly look.

It was very pitiful, he thought, to see one as young as she behaving in such a way—really pitiful. Because she was not unattractive; even a casual glance had informed him of that.

Dark-browed, she was, and dark-eyed; but with hair that was bright and soft and almost blond, and a lovely rose color in her cheeks; the sort of girl a man would admire, if there had been the true womanly gentleness in her aspect. But after that look, it was impossible to admire; he could only pity.

Strange as it may seem, Miss Selby pitied him, and for a somewhat illogical reason. She saw pathos in the man because he was so large—so much too large. His great shoulders towered above the table; knives and forks looked like toys in his lean, brown hands, and his face was invisible, unless she raised her eyes, which she did not intend to do again.

She had seen him, though, as he crossed the room, and she might have thought him not bad looking, if he had not come to sit at her table. It was an honest and alert young face, healthily tanned, with warm, gray eyes, and a crest of wheat-colored hair above his forehead. But when he did sit

down at her table, she immediately began her usual comparisons.

She imagined this young man in that sitting room in Boston, and she saw clearly how much too large he was. It was a small room, and her mother and her grandmother and her two aunts were all of a nice, neat, polite size.

"Like a bull in a china shop," she thought, imagining him among them.

This was unjust. It is never fair to judge bulls by their possible behavior in china shops, anyhow; they seldom go into them, and when seen in the fields, or in bullfights, and so on, they are really noble animals.

But that is what she did think, and as soon as she could finish her dinner, she arose, with another of those almost imperceptible nods, and went away. She went up to her own room, and began to study shorthand.

She did this every evening, with great earnestness, for she was very anxious to get a better position than the one she now had, and she was so far advanced in her study that she could write absolutely anything in shorthand—if you gave her time enough. She could often read what she had written, too.

As for Mr. Anderson, he also went up to his room, but not to study. He had had all he wanted of that at college. Nor did he need to worry about a better position.

The one he had was good, and he was confident that he would have a better one next year, and a still better one the year after that, and so on and on, until he was one of the leading paper manufacturers in the country—if not the leading one. He had just been made assistant superintendent of a paper mill in this little town, and he had come out in the most hopeful and cheerful humor.

The hope and cheer had fled, now. He felt profoundly dejected. He had no friends here, and if other people were like that girl, he never would have any. For all he knew, there might be something repellent in his manner, which his old friends had kindly overlooked.

He began to think sorrowfully of those old friends, of the little flat he had had in New York with two other fellows—such nice fellows—such a nice flat. When you looked out of the window there you saw a façade of other windows, with shaded lamps in them, and the shadows of people passing back and forth, and down below in

the street more people, and taxis, and big, quiet, smooth-running private cars, and all the familiar city sounds. And here, outside this window, there were trees—nothing but trees.

He had heard, often enough, about the loneliness of country dwellers when in a great city, but he felt that it was not to be compared with the loneliness of a city dweller among trees. He got up and went to the window, and he couldn't even see a human creature, only those sentinel trees, moving a little against the pale and cloudy sky.

It was a May night, and the air that blew on his face was May air, a wonderful thing, filled with tender and exquisite perfumes, so cool and sweet that he grew suddenly sick of his tobacco-scented room, and decided to go out on the veranda.

What happened was a coincidence, but it would surely have happened, sooner or later. He met Miss Selby. As soon as he had stepped outside, she opened the door and came out, too.

There was an electric light in the ceiling of this veranda, which gave it a singularly cheerless appearance, rather like the deck of a deserted ship, with the chairs all drawn up along the wall. There was nobody else there, and Mr. Anderson stood directly under the light, so that she could see him very plainly.

She said: "Oh!" and drew back hastily, putting her hand on the doorknob.

This was a little too much!

"Look here!" said Mr. Anderson crisply. "Don't go in on *my* account. I'll go, myself."

Now, Miss Selby was not really haughty or disagreeable. Simply, she had been brought up on all sorts of Red Riding-hood tales, in which all the trouble was caused by giving encouragement to strangers.

She had been taught that it was a mad, reckless thing to acknowledge the existence of persons whose grandparents had not been known, and favorably known, to her grandparents. But certainly she had no desire to offend any one, and this stranger did seem to be offended. So she said:

"Oh, no! You mustn't think of such a thing!"

She meant it kindly, but unfortunately she was utterly unable to speak in a natural way to a stranger. In reality she was a poor, homesick, affectionate, kind-hearted young girl of twenty, who, not fifteen min-

utes before, had been weeping from sheer loneliness.

But she spoke in what seemed to him an obnoxiously condescending and superior tone. He was a young man of many excellent qualities, but meekness was not one of them, and he resented this tone.

So he spoke with an air of amused indulgence, as if he thought her such a funny little thing:

"I don't want to drive you away, you know."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Why, of course not!" she said, just as much amused as he was, and sat down in one of the chairs against the wall.

She sat there, and he stood opposite her, leaning against the railing, both of them silently not liking each other. Presently the silence became unbearable.

"The spring has come early this year," observed Miss Selby.

Mr. Anderson, the city dweller, knew precious little about what was expected of spring, but he was determined to say something, anything.

"Yes," he agreed. "They were selling violets in the streets yesterday."

Miss Selby looked at him with a sort of horror. Was *that* his idea of spring—violets being sold on street corners?

"But that doesn't mean anything!" she cried. "They were probably hothouse violets, anyway. You can't possibly see the real spring unless you go in the woods."

She needn't think she owned the spring. Every year of his life he had spent several weeks in the country at various hotels. He had seen any number of woods, had walked in them, and admired them, too, with moderation, however.

"Yes, I know," he admitted. "Last June I motored up through Connecticut—"

"Oh, but that's different!" she explained. "Motoring—that's not the same thing at all! There's a little wood near here—I go there almost every Sunday—I wish you could see it!"

"I'd like to," he replied, without realizing the step implied.

They were both dismayed by what had happened. Miss Selby arose hastily.

"Well—good night!" she said, and fled upstairs to her room in a panic.

"Heavens!" she thought. "Did he think I wanted him to come with me tomorrow? Oh, dear! How—how awfully awkward! Oh, I do hope it will rain!"

Mr. Anderson, left by himself, lit his pipe.

"After that," he mused, "of course I'll have to ask her to let me go with her tomorrow. That's only common courtesy."

Very well, he was willing to make the sacrifice.

II

It did not rain the next day. On the contrary, it was as bright and blithe a day as ever dawned. There was no plausible reason why a person who went into the woods almost every Sunday should not go to-day.

"It would be too rude, just to walk off, if he thinks I meant him to come along," thought Miss Selby. "But perhaps he won't say anything more about it."

He did not appear in the dining room while she ate her breakfast.

"Probably he's still asleep," she thought, with that pardonable pride every one feels at being up before some one else.

He was not asleep. On the contrary, he was looking at her that very moment, as she sat down at her precious table, eating the Sunday morning coffee ring. He had breakfasted early on purpose, hoping that by so doing he would avoid her, for the more he meditated upon her behavior, the more sternly did he disapprove of it, and he had come downstairs this morning resolved to be merely polite.

He could not help sitting at her table; certainly he didn't want to, and she had no right to treat him as if he were an annoying intruder. But, no matter what she did, he intended to be polite.

And, as he sat on the veranda railing and observed her through the window, he thought that perhaps it would not be so very difficult to be polite to her. She looked rather nice this morning, in her neat, dark dress, with the sun touching her brown hair to a warm brightness, and a sort of Sunday tranquillity about her. He felt a chivalrous readiness to take a walk in the woods with her; she might even point out all the flowers and tell him facts about them, if she liked.

She arose, and he turned his head and contemplated the landscape, so that he would not be looking at her when she came out of the door. Only, she didn't come. Although he kept his head turned aside for a long time, he heard no sound of a door opening or of footsteps, nothing but the

subdued voices of the four old ladies who sat on the veranda, enjoying the sunshine.

He glanced toward the dining room. She was not there. Very well; probably she had changed her mind, and he would not be called upon to be chivalrous, after all. He would have the whole day to himself, the whole immensely long, blank, solitary day.

Miss Selby, however, had simply gone upstairs to put on her hat. Or, rather, she put on three hats, one after the other, two rather old ones, and one quite new. She decided in favor of an old one, and felt somewhat proud of herself for this, because didn't it show how little she cared about strangers? If it happened to be a singularly becoming hat, she couldn't help it.

She went downstairs and out on the veranda, and there he was, even bigger, she thought, than he had been last evening; a tremendous creature, fairly towering above all the old ladies, and looking most alarmingly masculine and strange.

Something like panic seized her. He was so absolutely a stranger; she knew nothing whatever about him; he might be the most undesirable acquaintance that ever breathed.

But when he said "Good morning," she had to answer, and, in answering, had to look at him, and was obliged to admit that his face was not exactly sinister.

"Off for a stroll?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes, I am."

There was a silence, then chivalry required Mr. Anderson to speak.

"Well—" he said. "If you don't mind—I mean—I'd be very pleased—"

"Oh! Certainly!" said Miss Selby.

So off they went, together. They went across the lawn and down the road, and after the first moment of awkwardness, they got on very well.

Indeed, it was extraordinary to see upon how many topics they thought alike. They both agreed that it was a beautiful morning; that the spring was the best time of the year, that the smell of pine needles warm in the sun was unique and delightful, and that Mrs. Brown's coffee was very, very bad.

Then, according to Miss Selby's directions, they turned off the highway and entered the wood. It was not a thick and somber wood, but a lovely little glade where slim silver birches grew, among bigger and more stalwart trees, standing well spaced,

so that the sun came through the budding branches, making a delicate arabesque of light and shadow.

And it was all so fresh, so verdant, so joyous, like one of those half-enchanted forests through which knights used to ride, long ago, when the world was younger. It was so serene, and yet so gay, that even Mr. Anderson, the champion of cities, was captivated.

He walked through that wood with Miss Selby, he saw how she looked when she found violets growing, saw her, so to speak, in her natural habitat, where she belonged, and that seemed to him something not easily to be forgotten. There was Miss Selby, down on her knees, picking violets; Miss Selby looking up at him, with that lovely color in her cheeks, and her clear, candid eyes, asking him if they weren't the "prettiest things?"

He answered: "No!" with considerable emphasis, but somehow she did not trouble to ask him what he meant.

She fancied that Mr. Anderson appeared to better advantage in the woods. Seen among the trees he didn't seem too large; indeed, with his blond crest, his mighty shoulders, his long, easy stride, he was not in the least like a bull in a china shop, but a notably fine-looking young fellow.

In short, when Miss Selby and Mr. Anderson returned to the boarding house for the midday dinner, they no longer disliked each other.

III

THE old ladies had noticed this at once, and it pleased them. They saw Miss Selby and Mr. Anderson talking cheerfully to each other at the little table, and they said to one another: "Young people— young people," and they were old enough to understand what that meant.

The "young people" themselves did not understand. They didn't even know that they were especially young, and certainly they saw nothing charming or interesting in the fact that they were sitting at a small table and talking to each other.

They were, at heart, a little uneasy because they had stopped disliking each other. Dislike was such a neat, definite, vigorous thing to feel, and when it melted away, it left such a disturbing vagueness. Of course, Miss Selby knew that she could not possibly like a stranger; the most she would allow herself was—not to dislike him, and

simply "not disliking" a person is a very unsatisfactory state of mind.

It couldn't be helped, however. The dislike was gone. And there they sat, not disliking each other, every single evening at that little table. Naturally, they talked, and naturally, being at such close quarters, they watched each other what time they talked, and when you do that, it is extraordinary what a number of things you learn without being told.

The little shadow that flits across a face, the smile that is on the lips and not in the eyes, the brave words and the anxious glance—these things are eloquent.

For instance, Miss Selby talked about that unique household in Boston. She did not say much, that wasn't her way; yet Mr. Anderson deduced that the mother, the grandmother, and the two aunts were, so to speak, besieged in their Bostonian home, that the wolf was at their door, and that Miss Selby was engaged in keeping him at a safe distance. And that she was probably the pluckiest, finest girl who had ever lived, struggling on all by herself, homesick and lonely, and so young and little.

As for him, he talked chiefly about the manufacture of paper. Until now this subject had not been a particular hobby of Miss Selby's, but the more she heard about it, the more she realized what an interesting and fascinating topic it was. What is more, while Mr. Anderson talked about paper, he told her, without knowing it, many other things.

She learned that he was a very likable young fellow, with a great many friends, and yet was sometimes a little lonely, because he had no one of his own; that he was prodigiously ambitious, yet found his successful progress in the paper business a little melancholy sometimes, because no one else was very much affected by it. He said he had been brought up by an aunt who had given him an expensive education and a great many advantages; he spoke most dutifully of this aunt, and of all that he owed to her, yet Miss Selby felt certain that this aunt was a very disagreeable sort of person, who never let people forget what they owed her.

Very different from Miss Selby's aunts! She had even begun to think that perhaps her aunts, together with her mother and grandmother, might like Mr. Anderson, in spite of his size.

And then he spoiled everything. To be

sure, he thought it was she who spoiled everything, but she knew better. It was his lamentable, his truly deplorable, masculine vanity. This man, who appeared so independent, so intelligent—

This disillusioning incident took place on the second Sunday of their acquaintance—the Sunday after that first walk. Almost as a matter of course they set forth upon another walk, and as it was a bright, windy day, rather too cool for sauntering in the woods, they went along the highway at a brisk pace.

The spring had capriciously withdrawn. The burgeoning branches were flung about wildly against a sky blue, clear and cold; the ground underfoot felt hard; everything gentle, promising and beguiling had gone out of the world. And perhaps this affected Miss Selby; her cheeks were very rosy, her eyes shining, and she was in high spirits, even to the point of teasing Mr. Anderson a little.

He found this singularly agreeable. For the most part, he could see nothing but the top of her hat, coming along briskly beside him; but every now and then she glanced up, and each time she did so he felt a little dazzled, because of the radiance there was about her this day. He thought—but how glad he was, later on, that he had kept his thoughts to himself!

There was a steep hill before them, and they went at it with that feeling of pleasant excitement one has about new hills; they wanted to get to the top and see what was on the other side. And very likely they were a sort of allegory of youth, which always wants to get to the top of hills and hopes to find something much better on the other side; but this idea did not occur to them. And, alas, they never reached the top!

Halfway up that hill there was a garden with a stone wall about it; a wide lawn, ornamented with dwarf firs, a fine garden of the formal sort, but not very interesting, and Miss Selby and Mr. Anderson were not interested. They would have passed by with no more than a casual glance, but as they drew near the gate a dog began to bark in a desperate and violent fashion. And a sweet and plaintive voice said:

"Oh, Sandy! Stop, you naughty boy!"

Naturally they both turned their heads then, and they saw Mrs. Granger standing behind the gate. At that time they did not know her name was Mrs. Granger, or any

other facts about her; but Miss Selby always believed that, at that first glance, she learned more about Mrs. Granger than—well, than certain other people ever learned, in weeks of acquaintance.

A charming little lady, Mrs. Granger was—dark and fragile, very plaintive, very gentle, the sort of woman a really chivalrous man feels sorry for. Especially at that moment when she was having such a very bad time with that dog.

It was a rough and unruly young dog—a collie, and a fine specimen, too, but ill trained. She was holding him by the collar, and he was struggling to get free, and barking furiously, his jaws snapping open and shut as if jerked by a string, his whole body vibrating with his unreasonable emotional outburst.

"Keep quiet!" said she, with a pathetic attempt at severity, and when he did not obey, she gave him a sort of dab on the top of the head. It was more than his proud spirit would endure; he broke away from her, jumped over the low gate, and flew at Mr. Anderson.

But not in anger; on the contrary, he was wild with delight; he rushed round and round the young man, lay down on his shoes, licked his hands. And when Mr. Anderson patted him, he was fairly out of his mind, and rolled in the dust.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Granger. "But—how wonderful!" She turned to Miss Selby. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"Isn't what?" inquired Miss Selby. "I'm afraid I don't—"

"That strange instinct that animals have!" Mrs. Granger explained solemnly.

"What instinct?" asked Miss Selby, politely. "I thought he was just a friendly little dog."

"Oh, but he's not friendly with every one!" cried Mrs. Granger. "Not by any means!"

It was at this point that Miss Selby's disillusionment began. She looked at Mr. Anderson, expecting to find him looking amused, and instead of that, he was pleased—a little embarrassed, but certainly pleased!

Then the charming little lady spoke again, addressing Miss Selby:

"What darling wild roses!" she exclaimed. "I do wish I could find some!"

"They're azaleas," said Miss Selby. "And the woods at the foot of the hill—next to your garden—are full of them."

Mr. Anderson was not looking at them just then, but only heard their voices, and he was very much impressed by the contrast. One of them sounded so gentle and sweet, and the other so chill, so curt. It was deplorable that Miss Selby should be so ungracious; he was disappointed.

So he thought that he, at least, would be decently civil to the poor little woman, and he turned toward her with that intention, only he could think of nothing to say. He smiled, though, and Mrs. Granger smiled at him, and Miss Selby observed this.

And Mrs. Granger knew that Miss Selby observed this, and she smiled at Miss Selby. It was a smile that Mr. Anderson would never understand.

"I wish you'd both come in and look at my garden!" said Mrs. Granger, wistfully.

"We—" began Mr. Anderson, cheerfully, but Miss Selby interrupted.

"Thank you!" she said. "But I must go home now. Good morning."

And she actually set off, down the hill. Mr. Anderson, of course, was obliged to follow, and the dog, Sandy, had the same idea.

"Go home, old fellow!" the young man commanded.

Sandy gave a yelp of joy at being addressed, and stood expectantly beside him, grinning dog wise into his face. Mr. Anderson again ordered him home, and Mrs. Granger called him, but he did not go. He had to be dragged back by the collar and held, while Mrs. Granger fastened a leash to his collar.

"I never saw anything like it," she declared. "He's simply devoted to you."

"Dogs generally take to me," the young man admitted.

Mrs. Granger raised her soft dark eyes to his face.

"I think that's a very wonderful thing!" said she, quietly. "Because I'm sure they know. I'd trust Sandy's judgment against any human being's."

"Oh—well—" Mr. Anderson remarked, grown very red.

"You must come and see Sandy again some day," she suggested. "Poor little doggie!"

"I will!" said he. "Yes. Thanks, very much. I will!"

All this had taken considerable time, and Miss Selby was nowhere to be seen. He hurried after her and, turning the corner at the foot of the hill, saw her marching

briskly along ahead of him. She must have known that he would follow, yet she did not look back once, and when he reached her side she said nothing—neither did he. They went on.

Presently Miss Selby began to talk, making a very obvious effort to be polite. Mr. Anderson did not like this, but he, too, made an equally obvious effort at politeness, and succeeded quite as well as she did, and they continued in this formal, almost stately tone, for some time.

When she looked back upon it, Miss Selby was always at a loss to understand just how and when this correct tone had vanished from their conversation, and the quarrel had begun. For it was a quarrel—a genuine and a hearty one. And although Mrs. Granger was never once mentioned, yet the quarrel was about her.

Miss Selby declared flatly that dogs did not have any "wonderful instinct" for judging people. Mr. Anderson said he *knew* they did.

"What?" she cried. "You don't mean to say you think a dog knows by instinct whether any one is—good or bad?"

"That's exactly what I do mean," he declared.

Then Miss Selby laughed. She regretted it afterward, but it was done. She had laughed at Mr. Anderson, and he resented it, deeply.

They walked side by side for half a mile, and never said one single word, and by the time they reached the boarding house they had firmly established that worst of all complications, an angry silence. It was now impossible for either of them to speak.

IV

It was impossible to break that silence without an intolerable sacrifice of pride. Yet, so very, very small a thing would have sufficed; one entreating glance from Mr. Anderson, and Miss Selby would have responded willingly; just a shade of warmth in her smile, and the young man would have made an impetuous apology. But he was not going to give entreating glances to persons who laughed at him, and her smile showed no warmth at all, but instead an extreme chilliness.

They smiled when they met every evening in the dining room, simply to keep up appearances—and it was a complete failure. The old ladies noticed at once that something had gone wrong; they discussed

it with unflagging interest all week, wondering what had happened, and whose fault it was. They all hoped that matters would be adjusted by Sunday.

Sunday came, and it was a sweet, bright, warm day. The hour for taking walks came, and Mr. Anderson went out—alone. The old ladies were truly sorry to see this.

Miss Selby also saw it. She came out on the veranda just as he was going down the steps and, although she did not turn her head, she had caught a glimpse of his tall, broad-shouldered figure going off—alone. She had a book with her, and, sitting down in a sheltered corner, she began to read.

It was impossible. On this gay spring morning nothing printed in books could interest her. Not that she cared what Mr. Anderson did or where he went. Only, she was homesick and so very lonely. There was nobody to talk to, and it would be such a long, long time before she could afford to take a vacation and go back to Boston to see her own people.

"Er—good morning!" said Mr. Quincey, in his apologetic way.

For two months Mr. Quincey had been apologetically making attempts to talk to Miss Selby. He was a most inoffensive young man, a teller in the local bank; he had virtually all the virtues there are: thrift, industry, sobriety, honesty—and he knew people in Boston. Yet hitherto Miss Selby had discouraged him, for no good reason at all, but simply because she wished so to do.

Imagine his surprise and delight when this morning she replied to him with something like cordiality. The old ladies saw him sit down on the railing near her chair, they saw his pleased smile, and they decided that Miss Selby was a fickle and a heartless girl.

Then presently they saw Miss Selby go out for a walk with Mr. Quincey.

In the meantime, Mr. Anderson was striding along the quiet country roads at a tremendous pace. No; he did not like the country.

Except for his unique and wonderful paper mill, he could wish with all his heart that he were back in the city, where there were numbers of people he knew, friendly faces to see, jolly voices to hear. He could think of no particular person he was especially anxious to see, yet it seemed to him that he missed somebody, badly.

So, he went up that hill again. Again Sandy was there, and Mrs. Granger; again he was invited to look at the garden, and this time he accepted.

V

MRS. GRANGER was a widow, and she admitted herself that the loss of Mr. Granger had made her very sympathetic. She told Mr. Anderson that she "understood," and he firmly believed this, without exactly knowing what there was to be understood.

Anyhow, her manner was wonderfully soothing to one who had recently been laughed at, and the young man appreciated it. Twice they strolled round the garden, followed by Sandy, and Mrs. Granger, in a charming and playful way, made a chaperon of Sandy.

"You know you're Sandy's friend," she said. "He discovered you."

Mr. Anderson found this very touching.

Then, when they had come round to the gate for the second time, she said that she would be very pleased to see him if he would like to come in for a cup of tea that afternoon.

"Thank you!" he replied heartily. "That's very kind of you."

And he really did think it was very kind of her, and that she was a charming, gracious, kindly little lady, yet he had not said definitely whether he would come to tea or not.

For all the time, in the back of his mind, there was a queer, miserable feeling he could not define, a sense of guilt, as if he had been very careless about something very dear to him. He thought that he would not make up his mind until—well, until he saw—

What he saw was Miss Selby coming home from a walk with Mr. Quincey. She was carrying a small bouquet of violets, so he supposed that she had been in the woods—in those same woods—and with Mr. Quincey. So Mr. Anderson did go to tea with Mrs. Granger.

Mrs. Granger said he might come on Wednesday evening, and he went. She played on the piano and sang for him, and he praised her music so much that she was charmingly confused. Never did she guess that it was not admiration that moved him, but pity because she made so many mistakes in technique.

And he accounted all these mistakes to her credit; he thought, like many another

man, that the worse her performance in any art, the more domestic and womanly she must be. He felt a fine, chivalrous regard for the poor thing.

But still he kept waiting for some sign of relenting on the part of Miss Selby. Every evening, as he crossed the dining room to the little table he thought that perhaps to-night it would be different; perhaps to-night it would be as it had been during that time when they had talked to each other.

Of course, if she didn't care, he wasn't going to force his unwelcome conversation upon her. She was a woman; it was her place to make the first move.

What had he done, anyhow? Maybe he had been a little hasty, but at least he hadn't laughed at her, or ever had the slightest desire to do such a thing. And if, in her unreasonable feminine way, she wanted him to apologize for things he hadn't done, he was ready so to do—if she would make the first move.

"Very well!" thought Miss Selby every evening when she saw him. "If he's satisfied to—let things go on like this, I'm sure I don't care."

She was much better able to wear a calm expression of not caring than he was. He looked dejected and sulky. But when out of the public eye, he did better than she, for he merely walked up and down his room, or gazed out gloomily upon those depressing trees, while she, locked in her own room, often cried.

The next Sunday it rained, but nevertheless he went out early in the afternoon, and Miss Selby knew very well where he was going.

"Let him!" she said to herself. "If he's so easily taken in by that—that designing woman and her dog, I don't care! She's probably trained the dog to behave like that."

This was unjust. Mrs. Granger had no need to train dogs to bring guests into her house. Undoubtedly she liked Mr. Anderson, but if he had not come there would still have been Captain MacGregor, whom she had been liking for a good many years. Mr. Anderson was soon made aware of the captain's existence by Leroy.

Now, there is no denying that Leroy himself was a shock to the young man. To begin with, it seemed incredible that any one who looked as young as Mrs. Granger should have a son eight years old, and in

the second place, if she did have a son, it should have been a different kind of child.

Leroy was a nice enough boy in his way, but completely lacking in the plaintive and poetic charm of the mother. Indeed, he seemed more akin to Sandy, a rough, cheerful, headstrong young thing. But he had none of Sandy's admirable instinct for judging human nature, and in the beginning he did not like Mr. Anderson.

He was frank about it. He said that Mr. Anderson's watch was markedly inferior to Captain MacGregor's, and he expressed a belief that Captain MacGregor could, if he wished, lick Mr. Anderson. He said a good many things of this sort, so that the young man was badly prejudiced against this unknown captain some time before he met him.

And when he did meet him, on that rainy Sunday, nothing occurred to soften the prejudice. He found MacGregor installed as an old friend. He found also that the man had brought to Mrs. Granger, as a gift, six silk umbrellas.

Six! It was an overwhelming gift. Anderson himself had brought a box of chocolates, but this was completely overshadowed by the umbrellas, just as he himself was overshadowed by the impressive silence of the other man.

A big, weather-beaten fellow of forty-five or so was this MacGregor, with the face and the manner of a gigantic Sphinx; he was neither handsome nor entertaining, but it was impossible to ignore or despise him. The solid worth of him, the honest self-respect, and the massive obstinacy, were plainly apparent.

He was not worried by the appearance of a strange young man; on the contrary, he seemed mildly amused. He let Anderson do all the talking, and just sat in a corner of the veranda, smoking his pipe.

This aroused in Anderson an unworthy spirit of emulation. He did not enjoy being so completely overshadowed by this man and his six umbrellas, and he returned the very next evening with four superb phonograph records. He found MacGregor there, just opening a paper parcel containing fourteen pairs of white gloves.

He waited until Wednesday, and then he arrived with a long box of the most costly roses. The captain was not there, but Mrs. Granger showed Anderson a little gift she had received from him the night before—five mahogany clocks.

The unhappy young man was almost ready to give up then, until Mrs. Granger casually explained that Captain MacGregor was a marine insurance adjuster and, in the course of his business, was often able to buy articles which had been part of damaged cargoes and yet were themselves in nowise damaged.

"So that he sometimes brings me the most wonderful things," she said. "He is so thoughtful and generous. Don't you like him, Mr. Anderson?"

"Well, you see, I don't know him very well," Anderson replied.

He went home somewhat comforted. Not only had Mrs. Granger been unusually sympathetic and charming, but her words had inspired him with a new idea.

On Friday evening he arrived with a very large package, which he left in the hall. He then entered the sitting room, and found Mrs. Granger sweetly admiring the captain's latest gift—seven handsome black silk blouses, all exactly alike.

He let her go on admiring, and even generously said himself that they were "very nice." Then, after a decent interval—"By the way," he remarked, and went out into the hall and fetched in his package.

It was pretty imposing. He had spoken to the foreman of the paper mill, and the foreman had shown a friendly interest, so that he was now able to present to Mrs. Granger:

1 ream of the finest cream vellum writing paper, with envelopes.

2 reams of gray note paper, with blue envelopes.

1 ream of thin white writing paper, the envelopes lined with dark purple.

And a vast number of small memorandum pads; pink, blue, and yellow.

"Those are for Leroy," he said, with a modest air which failed to conceal his triumph. This time he had won; there was no doubt about it.

VI

ON Saturday night Miss Selby did not appear at the little table.

"Gone out to dinner," he thought.

Why shouldn't she go out to dinner? He simply hoped that she was enjoying herself. And, as he ate his solitary dinner, he thought about this; he imagined Miss Selby enjoying herself somewhere, sitting at some other table, and probably with some other young man sitting opposite her.

He knew how she would look if she were enjoying herself, with that lovely color in her cheeks, and that wonderful smile of hers. Well, it was none of his business—absolutely none of his business.

And yet, after dinner, he found occasion to stop the landlady in the hall, and to say, with an air of courteous indifference:

"That young lady who sits at my table—didn't see her to-night. Has she gone away?"

"No, Mr. Anderson!" answered Mrs. Brown, with stern solemnity. "She has not. She's lying upstairs, sick, at this very moment that I'm speaking to you. And I think it's pneumonia, that's what I think."

"Pneumonia!" he cried. "But only last night—"

"It takes you sudden," Mrs. Brown asserted. "And Miss Selby—well, people have often said to me how blooming she looked, but well I knew it was nerve, and nerve alone, that kept her going. Nerve strength!" she sighed. "It's a treacherous thing, Mr. Anderson. You live on your nerves, and then, all of a sudden, they snap—like that!"

And her bony fingers snapped loudly, a startling sound in the dimly lit hall. The young man was in no condition to judge of the value of Mrs. Brown's medical opinion; he was simply panic-stricken.

He went out of the house in a sort of blind haste, and began to walk along roads strange to him, under a cloudy and somber sky. He heard the voice of the wind in the trees, and to his unaccustomed ears it held no solace, but was a voice infinitely mournful.

Pneumonia! That little, little pretty thing—so far from home—ill and alone in a boarding house. Such a young, little thing.

He remembered that morning in the woods—her face when she had looked up at him from the violets she was picking—that radiant face, clear-eyed as a child's.

"It's my fault!" he cried aloud. "I ought to have known she couldn't take care of herself properly. It's my fault! The poor little thing! She's done some fool trick—got her feet wet—probably makes her lunch of an ice cream soda—perhaps she can't afford any lunch. And now—pneumonia! She had no *right* to get pneumonia! It's—"

He stopped short, in a still, dark little lane, clenched his hands, stood there shaken

by pain, by anger, by all the unreason of grief and anxiety.

"She ought to have known better!" he shouted.

VII

WHEN he came downstairs the next morning, Mrs. Brown regarded his strained and haggard face with profound interest, and she observed to one of the old ladies that she believed Mr. Anderson was "coming down with something."

He made inquiries about Miss Selby's health, and obtained very vague and confused replies, which he interpreted as people jaded and despondent from a bad night are apt to interpret things. He went into the dining room, but he could eat no breakfast. Who could, sitting alone at a little table, opposite an empty chair? Then he went out again.

It was a rainy day, but that was so fitting that he scarcely noticed it. He remembered having seen a greenhouse not far away, and he went there. It was not open on Sunday, but he made it be open. He banged so loud and so long on the door that at last an old man came out of a near-by cottage.

"It's a case of pneumonia!" said the young man, fiercely. "I've got to have some flowers."

So he was admitted to the greenhouse, and he bought everything there was, and then sat down at a little desk to write a card. He never forgot the writing of that card, the rain drumming down on the glass roof, the palms and rubber trees standing about him, and the hot, moist, steamy smell like a jungle. He never forgot what he wrote, or how he felt while he wrote it.

But there would be no use in repeating what he wrote, for nobody ever read that card.

He put it with the flowers, and set off home. When he got there he gave the bouquet, very sodden now, to Mrs. Brown's servant, and said to her:

"Please give this to Miss Selby. Give it to her yourself; don't send it."

Then he went up to his own room and locked the door. And the room was all filled with the gray light of a rainy day.

The clang of the dinner bell startled him; he jumped up, scowling, and muttered: "Oh, shut up!" But, just the same, he had to obey it. He had to go downstairs, and had to sit at the little table.

Scarcely had he sat down when he saw Miss Selby enter the room—Miss Selby in a new dark green linen dress, looking unusually pretty, and not even pale.

He arose; he was pale enough. He couldn't speak. She must have received that card; she must have read it. As she glanced at him, he saw the color deepen in her cheeks, and her smile was uncertain. She was so lovely.

"I thought—" he began.

She sat down, and he did, too. Again their eyes met.

"It's a miserable day," she observed.

He didn't think so. He thought it was the most beautiful day that had ever dawned; and he might have said something of the sort if he had not just at that moment seen an awful thing. He stared, appalled, almost unbelieving.

The waitress was coming across the room, carrying his immense bouquet.

"No!" he cried, half rising.

But it was too late; she had come; she presented the bouquet to Miss Selby with a pleased and kindly smile.

"For you!" she announced.

Every one in the room was watching with deep interest.

"See here!" said the young man, in a low and unsteady voice. "I—I only got them because I thought—they—she told me—you had pneumonia. I thought—Give them back to her. Throw them away! I—I'm sorry—"

"Sorry I haven't got pneumonia?" asked Miss Selby. "It's too bad, but perhaps I can manage it some other time."

Her tone and her smile hurt him terribly. He wished that he could snatch the flowers away from her. She was laughing at him again; every one in the room was laughing at him.

And it didn't occur to him that Miss Selby couldn't possibly know how he felt, but was a very young and inexperienced creature who was also hurt by his strange manner of giving bouquets. She thought he wanted her to know that, unless she were very ill, he wouldn't dream of giving her flowers. She was even more hurt than he was.

"Will you bring a vase, please, Kate?" she asked.

Katie did bring a vase, and the hateful and offensive flowers were set up between them, like a hedge. He leaned over, and with his penknife deliberately cut off the

card tied to the stems and put it into his pocket.

And not one more word did they speak all through that dreadful meal.

VIII

IN his pain and anger and humiliation he turned blindly to Mrs. Granger, the charming little lady who never laughed at any one. He couldn't get to her fast enough; he strode on through the mud in the steady downpour of rain, simply longing to see her, and to hear her soft, gracious voice, and to be within the shelter of her friendly home.

That card was still in his pocket; he took it out, and as he walked along, tore it into bits and strewed them behind him. They fell into puddles, where they would lie to be trampled on, those words he had written—a suitable end for them.

He pushed open the gate of Mrs. Granger's garden, and was very much comforted by Sandy's ecstatic welcome. Dogs *did* know. They appreciated it when you meant well; they were not suspicious, not mocking. When you gave them something they accepted it in good faith.

He went on toward the house, walking rapidly, impatient to get in there to the gentle serenity of Mrs. Granger's presence. He rang the bell, and directly the parlor-maid opened the door he knew he was not going to have peace and solace.

Something had gone wrong. He could hear Leroy's voice raised in a loud, forlorn bellow, and Mrs. Granger's voice, tearful and trembling, and Captain MacGregor's voice, with a slightly exasperated note in it. He entered the sitting room, and there was Mrs. Granger, weeping, and Leroy sobbing. Sandy began to bark.

"Oh, Mr. Anderson!" cried Mrs. Granger. "How can you let him do that? Oh, please keep him quiet!"

Anderson put the dog outside, and then returned.

"But what's the matter?" he asked.

"Leroy's been bitten by a m-mad d-dog!" cried Mrs. Granger.

"Was *not* a mad dog!" Leroy asserted.

"See! Here on his leg!" she went on. "And he never told me! It happened late yesterday!"

"There's no reason to assume that the dog was mad," interrupted the captain.

"It was! Animals adore Leroy! Only a rabid dog would dream of biting him!"

"Was *not* a rabid dog," Leroy insisted sullenly.

"Well, see here!" said Anderson. "If you think—if you're worried—why not have his leg cauterized?"

"Oh, I can't!" she cried. "My child burned with red-hot irons!"

Leroy began to bellow at this inhuman suggestion, and Mrs. Granger clasped him in her arms.

"Don't cry, darling!" she sobbed. "Mother won't let them hurt you!" And she looked at Captain MacGregor and Mr. Anderson with unutterable reproach.

They were silent for a time.

"Well, see here!" Anderson suggested. "If you could find the dog, and—keep it under observation for a few days—"

This idea appealed to the child.

"Sure!" he said. "I'll find him, mom. You just let me alone, and I'll find him for you, all right!"

"You said you couldn't remember what the dog was like."

"Yes, I know. But I remember the street where it was, an' I'll go back there to-morrow," Leroy declared. "I could stay out o' school jist in the mornin' and jist—ferret it out. I got lots of clews. An' I bet you—"

"I'll go with you now," said Anderson.

The agitated mother didn't even thank him.

"Perhaps that would be a good idea," she admitted. "You might try it, anyhow, and see."

So Leroy was fortified against the rain in oilskins and rubbers, and he and Mr. Anderson set forth together in quest of the dog. The small boy was highly pleased with the adventure; he did not often have an opportunity to frolic in the rain, and he made the most of it, caracoling before Anderson like a sportive colt. Sandy, too, would have enjoyed it, but he was tied up.

"One dog at a time," said Anderson. "Now, young feller, let's hear about it."

"Aw, it was nothin'," Leroy replied with admirable nonchalance. "Jist a dog ran up an' bit me. I mean, I was runnin', an' I guess I stepped on his paw an' he bit me."

"Did you tell your mother you stepped on the dog?"

"I dunno what all I told her," Leroy admitted. "Anyway, what's it matter? Had to do somethin' to keep her quiet."

Anderson considered that it was not his

place to rebuke this child, and he let the disrespect pass.

"Where did it happen?"

"Long ways from here, all right!" said the boy, triumphantly.

He spoke no more than the truth. It was a very long way. They went on and on, down long, quiet suburban streets, lined with dripping trees and houses with no signs of life. They went on and on.

At first Leroy was talkative and cheerful, and found great satisfaction in splashing in puddles, but as time went on he grew silent, and tramped through the puddles more as a matter of principle than through enjoyment.

"What was the name of the street?" asked Anderson.

"Well, I don't know," the boy answered, "but I guess I'd know it if I saw it. Somewheres around here, it was. Might be around the next corner."

They went round the corner, and there was a candy store.

"That's it!" Leroy announced. "It's open, too."

Mr. Anderson said nothing, but walked steadily forward, and Leroy trotted by his side.

"They sure did have good lollypops in there," observed Leroy. "Best I ever tasted."

Still no response from the adult, possessor of all power and wealth. Leroy sighed. And Anderson turned to look at him, and discovered a wet and not very clean face upturned to his, with brown eyes very like Sandy's. Poor little kid, tramping along so bravely in his oilskins! He looked tired, too.

"All right!" said Anderson. "We'd better go back and get a few lollypops."

After that Leroy went on, much encouraged in spirit.

"Here's the street!" he cried at last. "The lil dog ran out o' one of those houses—I don't know which one."

Mr. Anderson rang the bell of the first house. The occupants owned no dog, never had, and never intended so to do. In the second house he was confronted by a very disagreeable old lady. She admitted that she had a dog, and she said, with unction, that her dog could and would bite any persons unlawfully trespassing on her property, as was any dog's right.

"I dare say Rover did bite the boy," she suggested, "if he came in here trampling

and stamping all over my flower beds. And serve him right, I say!"

"I did not!" said Leroy, indignantly. "And that's not the dog, Mr. Anderson. I can see him out the window. He's a police dog, and my dog was a little one."

They proceeded to the next house. Nobody came to the door at all. There was only one more house left on the street.

"Well, I hope the right dog's in there," said Leroy, "but—" He paused, then he laid his hand on Anderson's sleeve. "Most any lil dog would *do*," he said, very low, "for *her*."

Mr. Anderson was about to protest sternly against such a dishonest and immoral suggestion, but somehow he didn't. The child's hand looked so very small, and his manner was so trusting. He said nothing at all, simply walked up the path to this last house.

He rang the bell, and the door was opened with startling suddenness by a little man with spectacles and a neatly pointed white beard. He looked like a professor, and he was a professor—of Romance Languages—and because of his scholarly unworldliness, he had been cheated and swindled so many times that he had become fiercely suspicious. He glared.

"This boy has been bitten by a dog," Mr. Anderson explained. "And we want to find the dog, to see—"

"Ha!" said the little man. "And what has this to do with me, pray?"

"I thought perhaps you had a dog here—"

The professor folded his arms.

"Very well!" said he. "I have. And what of it?"

"If you'll let us see the dog—"

"Aha!" said the professor. "I see! A blackmailing scheme! You wish to see my dog. You will then cause this child to identify the dog as the one which bit him, in order that you may collect damages. A *ve-ry* pret-ty little scheme, I must admit!"

Anderson had had a singularly trying day, and he was very weary of this quest, anyhow.

"Nothing of the sort!" he said curtly. "If you'll be good enough to let us see your dog—or if you'll give me your assurance that the animal is perfectly healthy—"

"Don't you give him a penny, Joseph!" cried a quavering female voice from the dark depths of the hall.

The professor laughed ironically.

"*Ve-ry* pret-ty!" he repeated. "But you may as well understand, once and for all, that I absolutely refuse to allow you to see my dog, or to give you any assurance of any kind whatsoever."

And nothing could move him. Mr. Anderson argued with him with as much tact and politeness as he could manage just at that time, but in vain.

"See here!" he said at last. "Let me see the dog, and if it's the right one, I'll *buy* it. Now will you believe—"

But the professor would not believe until Anderson had signed a document which he drew up, solemnly promising that, if the dog were identified by Leroy as the dog which had bitten him, he, Winchell Anderson, would purchase the said dog for the sum of twenty-five dollars.

Then, and then only, was the dog brought into the room. And Leroy instantly, loudly and fervently asserted that it was *the* dog. By this time Mr. Anderson was perfectly willing to believe him. He paid the money and stooped to pick up the dog, a small animal, of what might be called the spaniel type.

It snapped at him. He could not pick it up, because on the next attempt his hand was bitten. At last, upon his paying in advance for the telephone call, the professor summoned a taxi. Mr. Anderson could not get the dog into the taxi, but Leroy had no trouble at all with it. It seemed to like Leroy.

They rode home in silence, because every time Anderson uttered a word the animal growled and struggled in the boy's arms.

They reached Mrs. Granger's house, and while Leroy ran ahead with the dog in his arms, Anderson delayed a minute to pay the taxi with the last bill remaining in his pockets. Then he followed. It had been a costly and a wearisome quest, but Mrs. Granger's relief and gratitude would be sufficient reward.

In the doorway of the sitting room he paused a moment, smiling to himself at the scene before him. Leroy was down on his knees, playing with this quite unexpected and delightful new dog, and Mrs. Granger knelt beside him, one arm about her son's neck.

Captain MacGregor was there, but in a corner, so that one need not consider him in the picture—the peaceful lamp-lit room, the gentle mother and her child.

"I'm very glad—" he began, when, at

the sound of his voice, the dog sprang up and rushed at him, and was caught by Leroy just in the nick of time. He growled threateningly.

"I guess I'd better tie him up," said Leroy. "He doesn't like Mr. Anderson."

"Why, how very strange!" Mrs. Granger exclaimed.

Leroy did tie him up to the leg of a table.

"But why doesn't the poor little doggie like Mr. Anderson?" pursued Mrs. Granger, and there was something in her voice that dismayed the young man.

"I don't know," he replied, briefly.

"It's very strange," she remarked. "Very! But sit down, Mr. Anderson. Perhaps you were just a little bit rough in handling him—without meaning to be."

"No, he wasn't!" Leroy asserted, indignantly. "He—"

At this point the dog broke loose, flew at Anderson, and would have bitten him if Anderson had not prevented him—with his foot.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Granger. "Oh, Mr. Anderson, how could you! You kicked the poor little doggie!"

"I—I simply pushed him—with my foot," said Anderson. "He's a bad-tempered little brute."

"Dogs are never bad-tempered unless they're badly treated," Mrs. Granger declared, with severity. "They always know a friend from a foe."

"All right!" the young man agreed. "Then I'm afraid I'm a foe." He turned toward the door. "If you'll excuse me," he said, "I'll be getting along. I'm—I'm tired. Good evening!"

"Good evening!" said Mrs. Granger and Captain MacGregor in unison.

She let him go! He opened the front door and stepped out into the rain again, and never in his life had he felt so bitter, so disappointed, so cruelly, intolerably depressed. After all he had done, she let him go like this! Not even a word of thanks. Poor little doggie, eh?

Halfway down the path he heard a shout; it was Leroy, rushing after him bare-headed through the rain.

"Say!" he shouted. "You're—"

Words failed him, and he stretched out his hand, a rough, warm little hand, wet from the rain, sticky from lollypops. Yet Anderson was very glad to clasp it tight.

"Good-by, old fellow!" he said.

"Good-by, old fellow, yourself!" answered Leroy.

And he sat on the gatepost, watching, and waving his hand as Anderson went down the road in the rainy dusk.

IX

MR. ANDERSON had finished with women forever. And this resolve gave to his face a new and not unbecoming sternness; the old ladies noticed it directly he entered the dining room that evening. Miss Selby noticed it, too, but pretended not to; she smiled that same chilly, polite smile, and said never a word—neither did he.

Supper was set before them, and they began to eat, still silent. And then she spoke suddenly.

"What's the matter with your hand, Mr. Anderson?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing; thanks!" he answered.

Again a silence. But she could not keep her eyes off that clumsily-tied bandage on his hand.

"I wish you'd tell me!" she said.

It was an entirely different tone, but he was no longer to be trifled with like that. He smiled, coldly.

"No doubt you'll be very much amused," he remarked, "to learn that I've been bitten by a dog!"

He waited.

"Why don't you laugh, Miss Selby?" he inquired. "It's funny enough, isn't it? After I said that dogs always know. It's what you might call 'biting irony,' isn't it?"

"I—don't want to laugh," said she. "I'm—just sorry."

He looked at her.

"Miss Selby!" he cried.

"I took your flowers upstairs," she said. "I think—they're the prettiest—the prettiest flowers—I—ever saw."

"Miss Selby!" he exclaimed again. "See here! Please! When I thought you were ill—"

"I only had a little cold."

"I wrote a note," he said. "I tore it up. I—I wish I hadn't."

Miss Selby was looking down at her plate.

"I wish you hadn't, too," she agreed.

The old ladies had all finished their suppers, but not one of them left the room. They were watching Miss Selby and Mr. Anderson. Surely not a remarkable spectacle, simply a nice looking young man and

a pretty young girl, sitting, quite speechless, now, at a little table.

Yet one old lady actually wiped tears from her eyes, and every one of them felt an odd and tender little stir at the heart, as if the perfume of very old memories had blown in at the opened window.

"Let's go out on the veranda," said Mr. Anderson to Miss Selby, and they did.

The rain was coming down steadily, and the wind sighed in the pines. But it was

a June night, a summer night, a young night.

Not an old lady set foot on the veranda that evening, not another human being heard what Miss Selby from Boston, and Mr. Anderson from New York had to say to each other.

Only Mrs. Brown, opening the door for a breath of fresh air, did happen to hear him saying something about the "best sort of paper for wedding announcements."

The Ghost of the Car

THIS WRAITH, AS USUAL WITH SPIRITS OF THE NIGHT, LIVED
ONLY IN THE CONSCIENCE OF A GUILTY MAN

By Holloway Horn

THOSE who knew Dr. Weston best were not surprised when he bought a practice—or rather *the* practice—in Wainbeach, one of the loneliest but most beautiful spots on the English coast. He was a bachelor of thirty-two, but he also bought the rambling house of the doctor whom he succeeded. This, possibly, amused his friends.

Many would have found life in Wainbeach intolerably dull, but the young doctor knew what he was doing. He had as much shooting, fishing, and sailing as he wanted; there was golf within a half hour's motor ride. These, with his work, filled his life, and who will say that it was not an enviable or useful one?

The people had loved his predecessor, but before many months had passed, Weston had almost as great a hold on their affections. Even adventure was not lacking, for, surely, a sudden call to a lonely farm ten miles away on the moors, where one may find the issue of life and death in one's hands, is high adventure. In any case, his presence in Wainbeach was destined to lead him to the greatest adventure of his life.

The chief drawback, perhaps, was the lack of any society of his own class. There were the men he met at the golf club, but in the village itself there was the vicar and

no one else. There was, indeed, only one other considerable house, and it had been empty for some months when he arrived. He was, therefore, glad when the news reached him that the Leys had been taken.

The newcomers had lived in London, he learned, but beyond that vague information he gathered nothing about them.

Some days later a Buick car passed him in the village as he was starting his own car. He caught only a fleeting glimpse of its occupants as it turned up the hill toward the Leys. There was an elderly man, a younger man, and a girl.

The girl alone he saw clearly, and that for not more than ten seconds. She was wearing a tightly-fitting hat of vivid red, and left him with an impression of a beautiful profile—a tender, delicate profile.

The following day, however, he saw her again. He was returning from a visit to a patient out on the moors, and passed her as she was walking up from the village. A great Alsatian dog walked solemnly by her side.

Her tawny hair was roughened and her face flushed by the wind that came in from the sea. The fleeting impression of her beauty was deepened. He had switched off his engine and came upon her suddenly as he turned a corner, so that she glanced

at him in surprise. There was—he hesitated for the word—a wistfulness in her beauty, a quality which persisted in his memory.

Inevitably, he found himself thinking of her that evening, by his bachelor fireside.

As the days went by, stray information of the new household reached him. The elderly man's name was John Findlay. The girl was his daughter. The younger man was Findlay's secretary, and the control of things seemed to be left very considerably to him; his name, it appeared, was Casson.

The villagers were frankly disappointed in the newcomers. Most of their supplies were sent from town, and they apparently meant to take no part in the life of the village. The secretary occasionally did some shooting, but the gamekeeper who had been with him was of opinion that he knew one end of a gun from the other, but no more. In short, as the villagers would have put it, they kept themselves *to* themselves.

II

THE call to the Leys took Dr. Weston completely by surprise. He had, that morning, seen Mr. Findlay in the Buick, but at eight thirty in the evening his housekeeper came in to inform him that an urgent message had come from the Leys, asking him to go there at once.

"The young lady's still on the phone, sir," the housekeeper said.

"Why didn't you say so?" he demanded, and was at the telephone before the housekeeper had recovered from her surprise at the unaccustomed sharpness in his voice.

"Hello!" he said.

"Is that Dr. Weston?"

"Yes."

"Miss Findlay speaking from the Leys. My father is suddenly taken ill. I should be very much obliged if you could come up immediately."

"I will certainly do so."

The Leys was nearly two miles from Wainbeach, and the doctor had not been there before. It was dark beneath the trees, and it was necessary for him to drive with great caution. As he came to the front of the house the door opened, and he saw that the girl herself was standing in the lighted hall.

"It is good of you to come at such short notice," she said. "I am very worried."

He followed her up a broad flight of

stairs to a room on the first floor. A heavily-shaded lamp on a small table by the bed was the only illumination, and the doctor had crossed to the bedside before he was aware that the secretary was sitting in a low chair on the far side of the old open fireplace in which a recently lighted fire was burning.

Dr. Weston examined his patient while the girl stood by, anxiously watching him. The man by the fire did not stir.

The case was not serious, but Mr. Findlay was obviously in considerable pain.

"A touch of gastritis," the doctor said. "You need not be unduly alarmed, Miss Findlay."

She accompanied him to the door, and they stood awhile talking in the hall. He had given his instructions as to the patient's diet and medicine, when he suddenly noticed that Casson was watching them from the top of the stairs. The girl by his side followed his glance—and he saw her shiver.

"It's cold," she said; but it was not cold.

The man was still watching them when the doctor went.

III

HE was quite certain of his diagnosis, quite certain that Mr. Findlay was in no danger, but in spite of it he was filled with a strange uneasiness. The man in the bedroom had said no word. It was not as if he were a son. Even then there would be no excuse for his intolerable manners. But for a secretary—after all, a servant—to follow them out and watch them—

The girl was frightened of Casson.

He saw it in a flash. That shiver—repulsion—fear.

There was something disquieting, mysterious, at the Leys. The look in the girl's eyes when she saw Casson at the top of the stairs had amazed him.

She had very beautiful eyes—a deep, calm blue. And fear in beautiful eyes is calculated considerably to perturb an imaginative bachelor.

As he turned into his own garden, he pulled himself up. He was a doctor. He had been called to a patient, and his thoughts were occupied with a girl's eyes and what he imagined he had seen in them. He went into his surgery, and since his dispenser had long since gone, put up the medicine himself.

He settled down by his fire with every desire to give to the *Times* the attention so eminent a journal deserved. But his intention was not carried out, for once again he fell to thinking of tawny hair and deep blue eyes.

The following morning he called again at the Leys. The patient was better. He said nothing except in reply to direct questions, but the doctor was satisfied that the malady was following a normal course.

Of Casson there was no sign.

Mary Findlay, quiet and anxious, was with her father; she came again to the door with the doctor.

There were dark shadows beneath her eyes, and the doctor, not altogether with a professional eye, could tell there was an anxiety about her, a tension.

"You mustn't overdo things, Miss Findlay," he said, with a completely professional air, "or we shall have you laid up as well."

She smiled.

"I'm all right," she said.

"You like our part of the country?" he asked.

"It is very lovely—" He sensed that the thought in her mind had not been fully expressed.

"Mr. Casson is out this morning?"

An arrow at a venture. He noticed a swift change in her face.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. He is out."

She gave him no opening. There was nothing else he could say beyond the conventional: "I'll call again to-morrow, Miss Findlay."

But he had discovered something; the fear, anxiety—whatever it was—was bound up in the figure of the secretary. Beyond that, however he might twist the few facts in his possession, he could not proceed.

IV

In the village he met Casson. He was driving the big Buick, and either did not recognize the doctor, or would not. He was evidently on his way back to the Leys—and the girl who was afraid of him.

In all, the doctor called at the Leys five times; on two occasions he saw Casson, but save for a curt: "Good morning," in reply to Weston's greeting when they met face to face in the hall, he did not speak.

It was a strange household, with a strange, brooding atmosphere, dominated by the sinister personality of Casson. Once,

as Mary Findlay was seeing him out, she said on a sudden: "Doctor—" Whatever the thought was in her mind, it did not achieve words.

"You were going to ask me something?" he inquired, after a few seconds of the blank silence which had seized her.

"No—" she answered. "No. It's nothing— You have been very good to us."

"One does what one can," he said, with a smile. "If there is anything further I can do, Miss Findlay—anything which would help you or make you less nervous—or unhappy—I am entirely at your service." He felt he had blundered badly.

"There is nothing," she said. "But you are right, though. I *am* nervous."

He was filled with a wild, insistent desire to help her. For the moment his normal caution had deserted him.

"If you ever want me, you have but to ring me up. I can be here in a few minutes by motor."

"You are very good," she declared again, in so low a voice that he barely caught the words. "But I'm sure it will be all right."

"You would rather not—let me try to help you?"

She shook her head.

"It isn't that—I can't— But you are very good."

"You promise to ring me up if you need me?" he asked impulsively.

"Yes. I do not know a living soul within a hundred miles but you. Ah—"

Unmistakably it was fear that suddenly came in her eyes. The man Casson was silently coming down the broad stairs behind them. The doctor turned and faced him, but Casson did not meet his eyes, and in silence passed through the hall.

"Seems a cheerful young fellow," Dr. Weston remarked grimly.

She made as if to speak, but once again caution or fear gripped her, and the words died away on her lips. She turned to the door.

"If I need your help, I will not hesitate to ask you," she said, and for a moment her eyes were on his.

"You promise that?" he asked eagerly, knowing well the pride of the girl and the compliment in her words.

"Yes," she answered.

He looked back as he reached his car; she was still standing where he had left her.

He pulled up his car at the point where the road drops downhill to Wainbeach. A less clearly marked road goes down sharply to the right to a small beach, and from the spur of the hill he could see the sands, wet and shimmering in the autumn sunshine, stretching away to the gray line on the horizon which was the sea. At low tide the sea goes far out, leaving sometimes a mile and a half of treacherous sand.

Dire stories the fisherfolk told of those quicksands. He was in the mood that day to brood on sinister, evil things, but with a short laugh he gripped himself and turned his car down the hill toward his home.

V

HE had now no shadow of a professional reason to continue visiting the Leys. The impression he had formed that something was very wrong there, that the girl who had stirred him so deeply went in daily and hourly fear of Casson, had been steadily strengthened until it became a certainty.

He knew, however, that he could do nothing for her against her will, but he had a feeling that one day she would make an appeal to him. Often, when he might have been elsewhere, he remained at home, to be within reach of the telephone.

He had attempted in vain to see a meaning, a significance, in the facts as he knew them. Clearly, Casson was no ordinary secretary. It rapidly became common knowledge in the village that he did exactly as he liked at the Leys. There were rumors of frequent and bitter quarrels between him and Mr. Findlay, over whom it was obvious Casson had some kind of a hold.

From time to time, Dr. Weston met Mary Findlay, but only rarely was she without either her father or the secretary. The autumn deepened into winter, but no message reached Weston from the Leys; the rumors of violent quarrels between the two men, however, were more insistent.

When at last the message did come, it was more startling than Weston had anticipated. He had answered the telephone himself.

"Come at once," Mary Findlay pleaded. "Something terrible has happened. I am terrified."

He knew the road well, but, for a normally careful driver, he took extraordinary risks that evening. He came within an inch of a collision with a big car coming from

the direction of the house, just after he had entered its grounds. It was the Buick, but he was not able to see who was in it.

The door of the house was opened before he had jumped from his car; he saw the girl's white, anguished face in the light of the lamp above the door. She grasped his hand convulsively.

"Thank God you've come, doctor—Mr. Casson is ill—an accident—"

He saw that she was laboring under the greatest excitement. Quietly closing the door, he turned to her with the calmness that men of his profession are schooled to show in moments of crisis.

"We'll have a look at him, shall we?"

"I can't— He's in the library— That room—"

"You sit down, then, Miss Findlay. Here, on this chair. And stay here quietly until I return."

With a sound that might have been a sigh or a sob, she obeyed.

He crossed to the room she had indicated and opened the door. As far as he could see from a cursory glance, it was empty.

It was a big room, and slowly he walked round it, looking under the old table and behind a chesterfield in the corner. There was no one there. He examined the French windows. They were unlocked. He opened them and looked out. As far as the circle of light from the room permitted him to see, there was no one there, either.

It was curious. Above all, he knew that he must be careful; he hesitated to return to the hall and tell Miss Findlay that the library was empty. He stood by the window, uncertain what to do.

The floor was covered with a thick, red Turkey carpet, and suddenly he noticed a stain in front of the fireplace. It was very little darker than the remainder of the carpet, but in that second he knew what it was. He touched it; it was sticky and wet, and where he had touched it his finger was red.

There was nothing to do but to go back to her.

VI

SHE was still sitting where he had left her, her face buried in her hands as if shame or anguish had overwhelmed her.

He crossed to her side.

"There's no one there," he said gently. "Evidently he was not as badly hurt as you imagined."

She sat upright as if he had struck her. "No one there?" she repeated in amazement. "But—I thought he was dead."

"I think you had better tell me what happened. I may be able to help you. You know that I am anxious to do so."

"There was a quarrel—my father struck him—with a silver candlestick."

"He was evidently stunned, that was all. The window is open."

"But my father! Where is he?"

Dr. Weston was silent.

"He was waiting there in the room—almost dazed," the girl went on. "He never meant to kill him. I swear he didn't. He struck him in a blind rage. He—he attempted to make love to me. My father came in as I was struggling with him—and in a moment it was over. He seized one of the candlesticks on the table and felled him. I thought he had killed him. So did father. He said that he had killed him. I had to beg him to let me ring you up."

Her words were vehement; the doctor knew that she was nearing the breaking point.

"You must make an effort to be calm," he said, in his gentle voice. "I won't leave you alone."

Suddenly she arose from her chair and faced him.

"I should never have asked you to come," she said. "You are goodness itself—I do appreciate how good you are. But will you go now, please?"

It was like a blow in the face.

"If that is your wish, Miss Findlay, I will certainly do so."

"Oh! You don't understand!" she cried. "It isn't my wish—but I—I can't help it. Please—please go."

"I am still at your service," he suggested. "If you want me, you have but to ring me up."

He saw the tears in her eyes, and crushed down a mad desire to take her in his arms and beg her to go with him, there and then, out of that house of fear and hatred.

"You really would prefer me not to stay?" He spoke as he might have spoken to a child in pain.

She nodded dumbly.

"Your car—the Buick—passed me," he said at a venture, "as I was entering the grounds."

"It must have been my father driving," she said, and there was a new fear in her voice. "You will, I know, never speak of

what you have seen here to-night, of what I have told you." Her hand was outstretched to him as if in supplication.

"No," he agreed gravely.

"Please forgive me! I knew you wouldn't. But I hardly know what I'm saying or doing. Will you go, now, please?"

"Good night," he said. "I can be with you within a few minutes, no matter what time you call me."

She did not reply, but for a second her grateful eyes met his.

VII

He drove very slowly on his homeward way. It was dreadful to think of Mary Findlay sitting in that house, alone, save for such servants as were there, waiting for her father to return—from where? And from what task?

It did not bear thinking about.

Very slowly he drove, and there was a grimness in his face as the possibilities of that night's work became clear to him. And fortunate it was that he was driving slowly, for a quarter mile or so beyond where he had met the Buick, at the point where the road, or rather the track, drops sharply down to the beach, he saw a huddled mass in the road. It was very still, in the beam of his headlights.

He pulled up and sprang from the car.

It was Casson; he was unconscious—he appeared to have completely collapsed—but he was alive.

Hurriedly the doctor examined him, and decided to take him on with him. He lifted the inert body into the back of his car. The question of taking him to the Leys—to Mary Findlay—did not enter his mind.

In his surgery he examined him carefully. The man, apparently, had fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. The hair above the ear was matted; but no serious damage had been done. The doctor was puzzled.

Casson had been completely stunned, but there was nothing to account for his fainting afterward. As the doctor could tell, the amount of blood he had lost would not be considerable. He succeeded in reviving him, but Casson did not recover full consciousness, although Weston saw he was well on the way to recovery.

One thing he noticed completely baffled the doctor. Casson was wearing brown shoes, and the wet sand had been above them, for his socks were thickly coated

with it. Evidently he had been on the flats under the cliffs.

With the aid of his housekeeper he made up an impromptu bed in his consulting room, and grimly settled down to wait until his unwelcome patient was fully conscious.

From time to time he glanced at the inert man. It was one o'clock before he was able to leave him for the night. His head was very bad, as well it might be, and the doctor administered a mild opiate. Casson was breathing easily when he left him, and seemed comparatively comfortable.

With his morning tea, the doctor received the news that his patient had disappeared; further, that he had, with unnecessary rudeness, left the front door wide open.

Although he was not certain of the reception which awaited him, Dr. Weston made up his mind at once to go to the Leys. He reached there just after ten.

Miss Findlay was sitting on a low chair in the hall, and arose as he came in. The stress of the previous night was obvious in her face.

"I thought I'd look in as I was passing," the doctor remarked blandly, but entirely unconvincingly. "I very nearly ran over Mr. Casson on my way home last night."

"He got in about seven o'clock," she said, without emotion of any kind in her voice. "He is in the library now. My father has not returned this morning. He says that father took him away in the car, thinking that he was dead."

"Casson was lying in the road when I found him."

"He says he fell from the car—or was pulled out and left. Both statements are probably lies." The bitterness in her voice startled him.

"He was never in danger from that blow," the doctor told her. "He was stunned; that was all."

"And my father thinks that he killed him! He is already in a very nervous state, as you know. I can't imagine what has happened. I hardly dare think about it at all."

"I understand," said Dr. Weston soothingly. "Casson will stay on here?"

She looked at him; he noticed the queer look in her eyes.

"If only you could get him away!" she exclaimed eagerly. "But he won't go!"

"Surely he must go at once if he is told to do so?"

She shook her head.

"You don't understand," she said.

"I understand that you are in fear of the man," he observed. "And that you are alone here."

"I did not sleep last night at all," she declared, after a silence. "I was too worried. I decided that I must tell you—certain things, in fairness. I know that I can trust you; that the knowledge is safe in your hands."

"That is as you wish," he said gravely.

"My name is not Findlay," she announced. "It is Mallory."

The name conveyed nothing to him.

"My father is Hector Mallory," she went on.

"Hector Mallory—I seem to know the name."

"There are warrants out against him for fraud in connection with certain financial companies. I do not understand it; but I am certain that what he did was for the best in a desperate attempt to retrieve his fortunes and save the money he had been intrusted with. It means prison if he is caught, and in his state of health that means death."

She spoke calmly, almost coldly.

"I remember something about the case now," said the doctor, who knew the effort her words had cost her.

"Casson was the secretary of one of the companies," she went on. "He tracked my father down, and has blackmailed us ever since. He has attempted to blackmail me into marriage."

Weston's face was grim.

"My father is virtually penniless. We live here on an income which I receive under my mother's will; it is quite separate from my father's. You now see the power the man has had over us—over me."

"He has no power over you now. You want him to go?"

"I do."

"And what if I go straight to the police?" asked a voice from the doorway.

VIII

CASSON was standing there. He had heard every word the girl had uttered.

"What if you do?" the doctor inquired calmly. "In any case, it is merely the state you are in which prevents me from throwing you out, neck and crop. I give you five minutes to be out of the house. You heard what Miss Findlay said. She is mistress here."

"This house is Mr. Mallory's. I am his secretary. I refuse to take orders from any but him."

"I give you five minutes. Half a minute has already gone," said the doctor, glancing at his watch.

"Then I go to the police?"

"Go wherever you wish, so long as you go. Blackmail is a crime in English law as well as being the foulest of all crimes. If you do go to the police, I will see that you are under arrest within twelve hours of doing so." He looked again at his watch. "You have three minutes left."

Sullenly, Casson turned away. A door at the side of the house was closed, and they saw him going slowly down the path toward the road and the village.

That afternoon the doctor learned that Casson had taken a room at the local inn.

Dr. Weston called again at the Leys in the evening, but there was no sign or news of Mallory. He talked awhile with Mary, and could not fail to notice the change in her. She was calmer, in spite of her natural anxiety about her father. The ejection of Casson apparently had made a tremendous difference.

Her hand rested in the doctor's for a moment at the parting. In the soft light of the hall her face was filled with quiet beauty.

"I am your friend always," he said.

"I know that," she replied almost in a whisper, and her eyes were on his as she spoke. The gentle pressure of her hand thrilled him so that he turned away from her almost jerkily.

It was dark when he reached his home. His garage was some distance from the house, and the drive to it was in darkness. He knew the way by heart, and did not switch on his headlights as he turned into it. He failed entirely to notice a man lurking in the deep shadow of a tree by the side of the garage.

As he got out of the car, he received a violent blow on the side of the head from a stick loaded with lead. It was a vicious blow; the doctor fell like a log. There was little noise, but, in the silence which followed the blow, some one laughed quietly.

The man who had been in ambush experienced considerable difficulty in getting the doctor's body into the car, but by dint of great effort he did so. He then climbed into the driver's seat and backed the car out into the road.

Had any one been passing at the moment they might have thought it odd that Mr. Casson should be driving Dr. Weston's car, but few people were abroad in the village at all after darkness had fallen, and the doctor's house stood on the outskirts.

Casson was an excellent driver, and handled the car with an efficiency which few drivers, under the circumstances, would have shown. He took the road leading to the Leys.

The man huddled in the back of the car was ignored. Casson had struck him with intent to kill, and was certain that he had carried out his intention, for there is a dreadful immobility in a stunned man which may well deceive any but an expert.

Dr. Weston, however, was not dead. He was not, indeed, completely unconscious. A sudden bumping, more than anything else, stirred him from the comatose state into which he had fallen. He knew that something had happened to him, although the insistent buzzing in his head bewildered him. But what it was eluded his consciousness.

It was very dark, he was in a car going downhill sharply, over an execrable road. There was no driving wheel—slowly it came back to him—the blow—and with the dawn of consciousness came the fear of the one man who could have struck such a felon blow—Casson.

The buzzing in his head was terrible, but there was another sound—a more familiar sound—the sea breaking in the distance on the sand bars.

IX

IN a flash Weston knew what was happening. He was being driven down the narrow lane to the deserted beach, to the wide stretch of treacherous sand. And in the same second he saw the hideous possibility of the situation.

He knew the way, and knew exactly what the driver would do. There was a flagged stone path up which the boats were pulled at high tides when they came in for repairs, but it was only at the highest tides, for the sea did not often come right in.

Bump—

That was the step at the bottom of the path.

The soft grating feel of sand—Casson was heading out to sea, toward that increasing roar at the sand bars.

Suddenly Casson pulled up and got out

of the car. He glanced at the inert man in the back, but it was too dark for Weston to see the evil grin on his face.

He had produced a piece of string from somewhere, and the doctor watched him tie up the driving wheel. The whole plan was clear.

The moon was coming up behind Wainbeach, but they were still in the shadow of the cliffs. Beyond them, in the moonlight, was the silver line of the sea.

The doctor was fully conscious now, and was under no illusions as to the appalling danger he was in. Casson had but to start the engine, jump clear, and in a matter of a few minutes the car and its contents would be silently engulfed forever in one or other of the terrible quicksands just inside the bar.

In the darkness the doctor felt for his pocketknife, and breathed a silent thanksgiving that it was still there. He would have flung himself upon Casson, but he did not trust his strength; he might easily become dizzy—might even faint.

And in the midst of his danger came the memory of the girl. He gripped himself. He dare not fail, for failure meant that she would once again be at the mercy of Casson.

In silence, Casson started the engine. It was in low gear, and he stepped away from it without difficulty.

Ten seconds later Weston acted. The car was approaching the moonlight, but he had clambered over the seat and freed the driving wheel before it left the intense darkness. Once the wheel was free, the car was under his control.

Switching off the lights, he turned it in to the safety of the firm sand, toward the green light on Hallam Head, which shone intermittently beyond Wainbeach.

For a moment a blind rage overcame Weston, and the temptation to turn the car and run Casson down before he reached the flagged way to the road was almost irresistible. But caution prevailed.

He drove slowly. And suddenly the cause of Mr. Findlay's disappearance was apparent to him. He saw the whole thing as if it had happened before his eyes. He and the Buick car had been sent on a last journey over those treacherous flats, even as Casson had meant to send him.

Casson had struggled up the hill after his foul deed, only to collapse at the top where he had found him; the meaning of the sand

on his shoes the previous evening was clear now. But what had passed in the library, and in the car, before it was driven down that steep lane to the sea, was a mystery. And the sands do not give up their mysteries.

Weston did not attempt to drive up the precipitous hill. It would be, as he knew, quicker and safer to make for the incline up to the primitive front at Wainbeach, a mile across the flats. He could see the faint lights along it in the distance; the sands between—so long as one kept near the cliffs—were as flat and firm as a table.

The chief danger was driftwood or other debris left by the receding tide, but he preferred to risk it rather than switch on his lights and thus warn Casson that his plot had failed.

X

SUDDENLY Weston was aware of something moving—some dark object fifty yards ahead. In that same second the figure stopped; he had evidently heard the car above the insistent sound of the sea.

Weston knew that it could only be the man who had attempted to murder him, for none of the villagers would be on the flats at such an hour. Casson, too, it was clear, had preferred the even stretch of sand to the rough steepness of the hill in the black night.

On an impulse Weston switched on his headlights. The shimmering sands jumped into life; in the same second a scream of terror broke across the night.

The doctor did not realize it at the time, but Casson was dashing blindly away from the gleam of light. He ran with the awkward, hesitating speed of a rabbit suddenly overtaken by the headlights of a car on a lonely road—a thing of dread and horrid fear.

Weston, almost instinctively, turned the car so as to keep the wretched man within the beam of light, but, suddenly conscious of the danger he himself was running, he stopped the car. Casson had passed out of the shadow of the hills into the moonlight, but was still running like a demented creature.

Another cry burst from him—an awful cry. In the clear, cold moonlight, Weston saw him throw up his hands, saw that he was sinking in the treacherous, gripping sand.

He shut his eyes—the sight was ghastly.

But there was nothing he could do, even if he had wished.

When he opened his eyes the shining expanse of the flat was unbroken in the moonlight, and the sullen roar of the sea filled the night.

For awhile Dr. Weston sat motionless before he started his engine to drive over the sands toward Wainbeach. However familiar one may be with death, it yet retains its power to awe and silence. For, as if a veil were lifted, he saw the meaning of the tragedy he had seen played out to its grim end.

Casson had seen him switch off the lights of his car, and had assumed that the sands had swallowed him and it. He was certain he had wiped his enemy from the face of the earth, from the sight of man, as long as time endures.

And suddenly, above the roar of the sea,

he heard the car, and was blinded by the glare of its headlights. The ghost of a car—bearing down on him—like fate.

XI

TWELVE months later Dr. Weston and Mary Mallory were married. They left Wainbeach, and the doctor acquired a thriving practice in a south-coast town. There is no fear in Mrs. Weston's eyes now.

But sometimes, when the doctor is out for that last stroll along the front in the moonlight, some detail in the scene will bring back to his memory that awful night of terror. He sees once again that shrieking figure, dashing in vain to escape from the horror its own outraged conscience had created.

But such occasions are rare, and Mary does not even suspect them.

WINTER EVENING

THERE is a presence at my door
Of short and halting breath;
Methinks 'tis in such chilling guise
I would envision death.
But here within my cheerful walls
The benison of lamplight falls
Upon my heart's desire—
A sheaf of song. And no wraith sits
Before my driftwood fire.

I dimly see through frosty pane
Snow heaped upon the sill;
And hear the chapel's carillon
Ring over Brandon Hill.
Eight times it rings, subdued and slow,
Undaunted by the winds that blow
About the slender spire.
It is a pleasant sound to hear
Before my driftwood fire.

At nine I fill my pipe once more
And watch the colors play
Upon the fagots—colors filched
From bright sea gardens far away.
Soon to my book I turn again
To find new beauties there. If then
My aging eyes should tire,
I dream the dreams that only come
Before my driftwood fire.

Edward W. Barnard

The Man With the Wash Leather Gloves

THE STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS NEWCOMER ON GAYLOR'S RUBBER ESTATE AT TUKABARA

By Edmund Snell

THE new fourth assistant on Gaylor's estate was queer. He had turned up at Tukabara with a weatherworn green canvas cabin trunk, a wooden zinc-lined chest, and an outfit that was both ample and correct. The advice from London that had preceded him gave Gaylor the impression that he had not been in the East before, but that in the opinion of the directors he was a man eminently suitable for the job.

Arundill, the first assistant, had taken the newcomer around, had shown him the general layout of the plantation, had explained at great length the various duties he was expected to perform, and had lent him a Malay vocabulary. Jim Masters had listened patiently and without comment, pocketed the book, and smiled a queer sort of smile that might have meant anything.

"So you want me to stew this up?" he suggested.

Arundill frowned.

"Of course! Malay's the *lingua franca* of this part of the world, and you won't get very far without it."

"No," murmured Masters absently. "No—I suppose not."

Arundill had escorted him to the bungalow that he was to share with the third assistant, then on leave, had introduced him to the cook boy, and had returned to his own quarters to await the stream of idiotic questions that he fully expected Masters to fire at him daily until the newcomer found his feet.

In this respect the first assistant was disappointed. Masters just dropped into the job as if he had been doing nothing else all his life, and a month's careful study

of the new fourth assistant left Arundill where he had started.

A sweltering June morning found the first assistant sitting on the edge of a long cane chair, with his topee between his knees, waiting for Gaylor and his daughter to finish their breakfast.

Prudence Gaylor was twenty-three. She was short and slight, with dark, fearless eyes and an abundance of bobbed brown hair that never seemed to require the least attention. In an odd sort of way she was pretty, especially in an excited moment when her cheeks were flushed and her parted lips showed the gleaming white of her small, regular teeth.

Keith Arundill liked her immensely. In his clumsy, material way he summed up her points as he would those of a horse or a good gun—and he wanted her because of them.

She was the best-looking girl on the island. She could ride like a man, play tennis with the best of them, shoot, swim, and handle a billiard cue as well as the manager himself. Arundill had been on the point of proposing to her a score of times, but he found matrimony a difficult subject to lead up to. It would not be too easy, he judged, to persuade Prudence that she needed a man to look after her when she was so confident of being able to look after herself.

Gaylor deposited his table napkin on the cloth and swung around in his chair.

"How's Masters shaping?" he demanded of Arundill.

The first assistant pursed up his lips.

"Pretty well for a newcomer—very well, in fact."

"That's good! Can he handle the men all right?"

Arundill nodded.

"To tell you the honest truth, I haven't yet succeeded in fathoming him. He's rather an extraordinary bird. I've a dim sort of suspicion he's been out this way before."

"Why don't you ask him?"

"I have. I tackled him about a week after he arrived. 'Oh, yes, thousands of times, old dear!' he said, and burst out laughing."

"Which seemed to imply that he hadn't."

"Exactly!"

Prudence hooked a cigarette out of the tin and lit it.

"Then what makes you think he has?" she asked.

Arundill shrugged his broad shoulders.

"It's not quite as easy to explain as it looks. Apart from the extraordinary grip he appears to have on his job, there's something about his walk and the general atmosphere that surrounds him when he's in the coolie lines that you don't find with the average fresh man. I've never managed to come up with him when he's giving orders, but he does give 'em, and, what's more, he gets 'em carried out. I lent him a book on Malay, but I know for a fact that he hasn't bothered to open it."

The manager grunted.

"Some mystery about him, eh?"

"Oh, I like a mystery!" Prudence Gaylor chimed in. "What's he like, Mr. Arundill?"

The first assistant shot a glance in her direction.

"Tall and thin."

"Good-looking?"

Arundill rubbed his chin.

"Not bad — fair-haired, clean-shaven, and all that sort of thing."

"About how old?"

"Don't know. Thirty or so, I should guess."

"Twenty-eight," put in the manager. "Would you call him reticent, Arundill?"

"Masters is one of those chaps," replied the other, "who say a deuce of a lot without telling you anything."

Prudence's eyes sparkled.

"You leave him to me!" she cried. "I'll worm the secret of his dreadful past out of him!"

"You'll have your work cut out," said Arundill.

"What 'll you bet me?"

Her father winked at his first assistant.

"Don't waste your money, Arundill. When Prudence is in form she'll worm anything from anybody."

"Which reminds me," laughed the girl, "that I'm in immediate need of two hundred dollars to send to John Little's."

"Oh? What for?"

"Gloves and things."

Gaylor spread out his hands, and his forehead wrinkled pathetically.

"There you are! What did I tell you?"

"Talking of gloves," broke in Arundill, "brings me back to our original subject. Masters takes a clean pair of wash leather gloves—lemon-colored things, you know—out with him every day."

Prudence dropped her cigarette over the rail into the garden.

"Gloves! What on earth for?"

"Heaven only knows. He carries them in a side pocket, and I've never seen him use them. Weird, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed the planter.

He rose presently and went into the office. Arundill followed suit. Prudence, left to her own devices, lit another cigarette and curled up in her cushioned chair.

Oei Chan crept noiselessly in from the back of the bungalow to clear the table, and the girl watched him through half closed lids. Oei Chan was old and wrinkled, and had served Gaylor for more years than the planter cared to remember.

Prudence's first question showed the trend of her thoughts.

"Oei Chan, you have seen the new *tuan*?"

"Yah, *mem-besar*, I have seen him."

She blew out a wreath of faint blue smoke, and the hand that held the cigarette drooped over the side of her chair.

"What do the coolies say of him?"

Oei Chan paused midway between the veranda and the living room. His queer, twisted expression suggested that he was reflecting.

"They say that his eye observes the idle coolie, even when he is not there; that his arm is strong, and that he is just."

The servant waited a few seconds more, bowed his head, and went out with the tray.

II

PRUDENCE allowed her gaze to travel beyond the veranda rail to the wild, exotic

garden, where an elderly coolie toiled in the sunshine. Thirty yards from the house the rubber began—avenues of shady trees planted by the white man over a vast area where once the jungle had run wild. Somewhere close at hand a native carpenter was plying a saw, and a Chinese washerman sang mournfully as he toiled.

A tall figure in white duck suddenly emerged from the trees and walked briskly toward the house. Prudence watched him with interest.

He was tall—six feet or a little over. His broad-brimmed topee was cocked over one eye, and a shiny Malacca cane was tucked under one arm. He reached the foot of the wooden stairs, and a brown, clean-shaven, good-humored face looked up at her.

"Morning, Miss Gaylor! Is the chief about?"

Prudence bestowed upon the newcomer her pleasantest smile.

"I believe he is. Do you want to see him?"

"I rather fancy he wants to see me."

"In that case, Mr. Masters, you'd better come in and wait. He's busy with Mr. Arundill at the moment."

Masters came up the steps, placed his sun helmet and his cane on the table that Oei Chan had just cleared, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"You can smoke, if you want to," said the girl. "How did you know I was Miss Gaylor?"

The fourth assistant was polishing the bowl of his pipe on the palm of his hand. He glanced up as she spoke.

"How did you know I was Mr. Masters?" he retorted pleasantly.

Prudence flushed.

"I didn't. I just guessed."

"Same here!" laughed Masters, and felt for his pouch.

The girl was laughing, too. The fourth assistant's air of persistent good humor was positively infectious.

He filled his pipe in silence. As his hand sought the matches, she earnestly hoped that he would pull those wash leather gloves from his pocket with them. No such eventuality, however, occurring, she was forced to rack her brain for some sentence with which to commence her campaign in search of knowledge.

"You're sharing Mr. Mason's bungalow, aren't you?"

"For the present—yes."

"How d'you like the life?"

"Not too bad. To be perfectly frank with you, I like it tremendously. It's such a complete change from life at home. Within certain limits a fellow can do his job in his own way and without constant interference."

"It isn't everybody," put in Prudence, "who can be trusted to work without supervision. Ignorance of the language must be an awful drawback at first. Do you find it so?"

Masters gazed ceilingward, following a smoke ring on its upward flight.

"It's awfully nice of you to take such an interest in my difficulties, Miss Gaylor, and I should ask nothing better than to sit here jawing to you about myself; but, unfortunately, I'm only the fourth assistant, with a pack of coolies idling away their time while I'm over on this side of the estate. I wonder if you'd mind ringing for somebody to see if your father can interview me now?"

She bit her lip.

"Mr. Arundill thinks you've been out East before," she declared desperately. "He thinks you know a lot too much for a new hand."

Masters removed his pipe from his lips and screwed up his eyes.

"Does he really, though? Now that's extraordinarily nice of Mr. Arundill!"

At that moment the office door opened, and Gaylor came out.

"Hello, Masters! I've just had a cable from England. Mason won't be coming out again."

"I see," said the fourth assistant.

"I'm given the option of taking an experienced man from one of our other estates, or promoting *you*."

The manager's keen eyes surveyed the younger man shrewdly.

"Experience counts for a lot in a question like this," he continued presently.

Prudence had risen from her chair and was leaning against the veranda rail, watching Masters. This latest addition to the Tukabara staff stood very erect, his firm chin tilted upward, his gaze riveted on the farther wall. He was evidently turning something over in his mind, and the girl was curious to know what his reply would be. An opportunity of advancement in so short a time rarely presented itself, and she could scarcely imagine a man of Mas-

ters's caliber turning it down. Without putting it into so many words, Gaylor had said, in effect:

"Well, Masters, we all know you've seen a rubber plantation before. Put your cards on the table, and the job's yours!"

"I quite see your point," admitted the assistant at last; "and of course, if you decided to put your money on the other fellow, I should be the last to grumble." His expression changed swiftly, and he looked the manager straight in the eyes. "I tell you what, Mr. Gaylor—let me have a cut at it. Give me Mason's billet for a couple of months without pay. I won't let you down."

Arundill and the manager exchanged glances.

"Right you are!" said Gaylor. "I'll take you on those terms. You're third now, and I'm cabling home to that effect."

"Thanks," replied Masters, without emotion. "If you'll excuse me, I'll get back."

He saluted, picked up his stick, and went briskly down the garden toward the trees.

Arundill looked at Prudence.

"How did you get on?"

"Rotten," she admitted frankly.

Gaylor raised his brows.

"You don't mean to tell me—"

"I do," said the girl. "I told him what we all thought—and he thanked me for the compliment!"

A shadow fell across the floor, and De Laris, the second assistant, appeared on the threshold. He was short and lithe, dark-skinned like a Southern European, with a hooked nose and an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

"I say," he demanded wrathfully, "who gave our new fourth authority to offer me advice?"

"Third," corrected Gaylor quietly. "Mason's resigned."

"Well, third, then. He passed me as I was riding up. I called him back and told him to take a message to one of my *mandors*. He promptly declined—said he wasn't going that way or something. Then, without turning a hair, he coolly advised me to keep a close eye on Ho Kwei, or I should have trouble!"

Gaylor was lighting his pipe.

"Offended your sense of dignity, eh, De Laris?"

The other crimsoned.

"Well, sir, it was pretty cool, don't you think? Besides, Ho Kwei is the best *mandor* I've got."

"You didn't say anything, I suppose," interposed Arundill, "that was calculated to put Masters's back up?"

"If a fellow in my position can't order a junior about, then all I can say is—"

The manager flicked a match into space and prodded the freshly ignited tobacco with a forefinger.

"It so happens, De Laris, that you're not here to order Masters about, and I'm not disposed to take any interest in your private quarrels. Did he explain his reasons for mistrusting Ho Kwei?"

De Laris shook his head.

"I didn't stop to inquire. Considering the short time he's been here, the whole thing was positively ludicrous!"

"Masters was walking," said the manager. "You could catch him up pretty easily on your pony. Just ask him again. If he says Ho Kwei wants watching, he's probably right."

De Laris looked from Gaylor to Arundill, turned abruptly on his heel, and went out. He did not trouble to overtake Masters, but deliberately turned his pony's head in the direction of his own house.

III

JIM MASTERS was over at his bungalow on the far side of the plantation when the trouble with Ho Kwei came.

It was somewhere about ten at night that something made him throw aside the book he had been reading and walk across to the rail. The night was clear and still, and big stars blinked at him from a violet dome. Down in the valley, where several long wooden buildings clustered together, his own coolies slumbered peacefully. Away to the eastward, beyond the first strip of jungle, the desultory, deep-toned throbbing of native gongs marked the concluding hours of a festival.

In spite of the tranquillity of the area for which he was personally responsible, Masters was aware of a certain sense of uneasiness.

Presently there floated to his ears, from the distance, a confused mingling of voices, and, reflected in the heavens above the ridge of low hills that separated De Laris's section from his own, he noticed a queer patch of light.

He knocked out his pipe on a doorpost,

filled it again, and went into his room for the clothes that he had discarded earlier in the evening. When he reached the veranda again, the light was brighter and the din of voices still continued.

He stuck a cane under his arm and went out.

Between his house and the coolie lines he met a Pathan watchman carrying a hurricane lamp.

He stopped the man, and directed his attention to the light in the sky. The watchman nodded.

"The coolies of Tuan De Laris," he said.

He was responsible for order in Masters's lines, and the lack of it in other parts of the estate did not immediately concern him.

"There is trouble there," the assistant told him. "We will go over."

He took the shortest route, the watchman at his heels, and arrived at the top of the ridge in something under twenty minutes. Shading his eyes, he saw the shadowy outline of De Laris's bungalow to his right, and, immediately below him, deep down in a spacious hollow, a collection of blazing buildings, amid which scores of half clad figures, like absurd marionettes, ran and gesticulated and struggled.

When he went up the steps to De Laris's veranda, a lamp was still burning there. Masters hammered with his stick on the table, and shouted at the top of his voice, without obtaining an answer. In sheer desperation he began opening doors and exploring rooms, with the aid of the watchman's lamp. Presently he blundered into the owner's bedroom, and discovered De Laris asleep.

He tore aside the mosquito curtains and shook the slumberer roughly. De Laris rolled over on his back and blinked stupidly at the light.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Matter!" yelled Masters in his ear. "Your coolies are up, and are setting fire to everything!"

"That's all right!" said De Laris, somewhat inarticulately—and turned on his side again, with his back to the third assistant.

Masters stared hard at him for some seconds, cast an eye around the room, and, setting down the lamp, emptied the contents of the water jug over his senior's head and shoulders.

De Laris sat up.

"Hell! Who did that?"

"I did," returned the other, from the gloom. "You were too confoundedly drunk to rouse decently. There's a row in your coolie lines, don't you understand?—and it's up to you to get into some clothes and stop it. I'm off down there now!"

He hurried off without waiting for the other to reply, and, picking up the watchman on his way, went down the hill at the double.

A hundred yards brought them to the first sign of serious fighting—a coolie with a battered head lying right across the path. Farther on they encountered a Chinaman carrying another on his back. A breeze had sprung up now, and from the inferno which they were fast approaching gusts of smoke kept sweeping over them.

At sight of the white man, a cry went up, and some of the rioters scuttled for cover.

Masters felt in a pocket, and found his gloves. He pulled them on, buttoned them at the wrist, and, gripping his Malacca cane, strode toward where the crowd seemed thickest.

A big Oriental in a tattered loin cloth swayed to meet him. Masters saw that the man was half drunk with *samsu*, that an insolent smile played on his lips, and that he carried an ax.

The Englishman slackened his pace, prodded the tall man in the stomach with his cane, and, as the fellow's head jerked suddenly into range, dealt it a blow with his gloved fist that sent its owner staggering heavily against the wall of a blazing hut.

Taking immediate advantage of the effect that this summary action had upon the onlookers, Masters discarded his cane, and, oblivious of the fact that many of the coolies carried billhooks and hoes, fell upon them with such startling violence and accuracy that all further notions of rebellion were hammered out of them. Bunches of them fled, gibbering, for the forest, or dived for the shelter of buildings that were still intact. A few, who had perhaps been led away by others, waited sullenly in the background, anxious only to accept what punishment was in store for them and to consider the matter forgotten.

The third assistant straightened his jacket, picked up his stick, and cast a discerning eye over the scene.

"Here!" he called to the watchman. "Collect all the men you can find, and put out those fires. If you find Ho Kwei, bring him to me."

He smiled grimly to himself, lit a cigarette, and turned to find Gaylor and his daughter riding toward him.

"Hello, Masters!" shouted the manager. "Where's De Laris?"

The assistant stared all round him.

"Don't know," he responded steadily. "He must be somewhere about. I saw him just now."

He removed his gloves, rolled them into a ball, and dropped them into his pocket. Gaylor swung from the saddle.

"You appear to have the trouble well in hand," he observed.

Masters nodded.

"I fancy the ringleaders have bolted for the jungle. With your permission, I'll collect all the watchmen and *mandors* available and post them around the lines, to catch the runaways as they begin to drift back."

The manager rubbed his chin.

"Stay where you are for a little while," he said, "and look after Miss Gaylor. I'll stroll around and see how things are."

Gaylor moved off in the direction of the first hut. Prudence walked her mount to where Masters stood.

"What was Mr. De Laris doing while you were fighting all those men?" she asked.

The third assistant grinned.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Gaylor, I was far too busy to notice."

At that moment their eyes met, and, in the light of the fires that still burned, Masters saw something that startled him. He could have sworn that Prudence Gaylor was on the verge of tears.

"They might have killed you!" she said suddenly.

"They didn't get the chance," laughed Masters. "When I was in—where I was last, I mean—people used to say that when Jim Masters put on his gloves the fur was going to fly."

Prudence found her opportunity.

"Why do you put them on?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's a stupid sort of habit I got into. I found it had a wonderful moral effect upon the men I had to control. They got to know that I did it only when I was out to tackle something unclean, and a hit from a gloved hand seemed to bite deep—an insult added to injury, I suppose."

"What made you think of it?"

Out of the corner of his eye Masters saw

De Laris coming through the trees. He excused himself and went to meet the second assistant.

"De Laris," he said, "slip around the back of those huts, attach yourself to the first bunch of men you see, and look busy. The chief's there already, and he thinks you were in that little scrap."

De Laris, wild-eyed and trembling, hastened to obey, and the third assistant went back to the girl.

"Ho Kwei started this," she suggested.

"I believe so."

"You were afraid he would?"

Masters looked surprised.

"As a matter of fact, I was."

"Why?"

"One hears and sees things, you know. I might have been mistaken, of course; but, as luck would have it, I was right."

"You're usually right, aren't you?" murmured Prudence. "I wonder if it's only luck!"

"There's no harm in wondering," retorted Masters pleasantly. "Here's your father coming back to us."

"Masters," called the planter, "Arun-dill has turned up now, and it seems to me that you've done enough for to-night. Take my pony and ride back with Miss Gaylor; and please don't leave the bungalow until I come."

"Very good, sir! Shall I send over any watchman I can find?"

"You might as well."

Prudence and Masters took the slope together. At the top the girl looked back.

"It's a shame to take you away," she said. "Why don't you go back? I shall be all right."

"I've got my marching orders," returned Masters.

"But you'd rather be down there!"

"I wouldn't," declared the man.

"Honestly?"

"Honestly!"

She looked up at him, and they both laughed.

"You don't look thrilled," she remarked.

"Perhaps not," he told her; "but I feel highly honored, all the same."

IV

MASTERS rode back in the early hours on a borrowed pony. He was dimly aware that the air was chill, and that he was head over ears in love with Prudence Gaylor. This latter knowledge had come to him as

a shock during the concluding stages of their journey back to Gaylor's house. He had been trying, ever since, to persuade himself that he was the victim of a sudden wild infatuation, for which the night's events had been mainly responsible.

He awoke at seven o'clock, to find the conviction still firmly established in his mind and the large form of Arundill framed in his doorway.

"Morning, Masters! How d'you feel?"

"Fit, thanks." He slid to the floor and felt for his clothes. "Jove, I'm late this morning! Take a pew."

Arundill sat down.

"De Laris has gone to pieces," he announced, "and the chief wants you to take over his lines and get them into shape again. Ho Kwei and a dozen others are still missing. They may drift back, and they may not. Anyhow, Ho Kwei has suddenly shown up as a pretty desperate character, and he may try to cause more trouble."

Masters crossed over to the washstand.

"Aren't you putting rather a lot of responsibility on my shoulders?"

Arundill grinned.

"From what I can gather, they're quite capable of taking it. Well, I must be off. I'll expect to see you on the other side in an hour's time."

Masters devoured a hasty breakfast, and was in the second assistant's lines within forty minutes of Arundill's departure. He found De Laris with his shoulders hunched up, walking dejectedly about amid a heap of blackened ruins.

The second assistant glanced up malevolently as his junior approached.

"Hello, Masters! Still climbing?"

The other reined in his pony and sat erect in the saddle, his head inclined to one side.

"I suppose you're trying to insinuate that I'm scheming to get your job," he retorted, without emotion.

De Laris's eyes blazed.

"Scheming!" he echoed bitterly. "I like that! You know damned well you've got it, and why, and how! Who told Gaylor I was binged last night, if it wasn't you? Who sent a runner across to the chief's place, so that he and Miss Gaylor arrived in time to see a spectacular bit of tomfoolery? Worked it very nicely, didn't you?"

Masters drew out a clean pair of wash leather gloves.

"Go on, De Laris," he said quietly.

"Miss Gaylor evidently knew all about your promotion. She was down in these lines half an hour ago, hoping, I suppose, to congratulate you. Finding only myself in charge, she rode on."

A sudden fear assailed Masters.

"She didn't leave the estate?"

"She went off into those trees," declared De Laris, pointing to the forest. "I warned her not to go, but she told me to mind my own business, or words to that effect. She said she could look after herself, and I suppose she knows."

"De Laris," declared Masters sternly, "you're a bigger idiot than I thought. You can believe what you choose, but I went out of my way to defend you last night—and I'm deuced sorry I did. Arundill is due here in about ten minutes. Kindly stay here and tell him that I've followed Miss Gaylor."

He rode at headlong speed for the jungle.

The path through the trees ran parallel to the wire fence of the estate for a quarter of a mile, then branched abruptly northward. Masters pressed forward, looking anxiously from side to side. Here and there, where the earth was soft, he could see that a rider had been that way before him.

Presently he came to a point where two tracks met—the road that Prudence would normally follow to get back to her father's house, and another, less clearly marked, which wound uphill, following the bed of an old watercourse. Here he halted to reflect.

He had realized all along that there was just a possibility that the girl had passed through the trees unnoticed, in which case she was safely back on her own veranda, having breakfast, and all his anxiety on her behalf had been wasted. On the other hand, it was quite on the cards that Ho Kwei, fully aware of the penalty that he would pay if he were caught, had waylaid Miss Gaylor, hoping to compel the manager to come to terms.

Masters had just made up his mind to take the broader track, and to make certain, before proceeding farther, that she was still missing, when he thought he detected a movement in the trees to his left. He dismounted swiftly.

As he left the path, a figure slipped from behind a trunk and ran wildly through the undergrowth. Masters followed. He saw

the fellow clearly now—a gaunt Chinaman in a patched loin cloth, who stumbled as he ran. A hundred yards, and the white man had overtaken him.

The creature fell on his face, groveling abjectly. Masters prodded him delicately with the toe of his shoe.

"Where is the white lady?" he demanded in the dialect employed by the coolies.

"I know nothing!" babbled the man. "I have not seen her!"

The assistant pulled on his gloves and drew the Malacca cane from under his arm.

"You are lying," he suggested grimly. "You saw her ride through the forest. Which road did she take?"

The Chinaman's frightened eyes were riveted on Masters's cane.

"There was a rope across the path," he admitted at length, "and the lady fell."

Masters swallowed a lump that had risen in his throat.

"I understand," he said coldly. "You will lead me to where the white lady is—and Ho Kwei!"

"He will kill me!" moaned the coolie.

"On the contrary," declared Masters reassuringly, "it is I who will probably kill Ho Kwei."

He drove the man before him back to where the pony stood, and vaulted back into the saddle. They took the uphill path, the coolie leading, and half an hour later they came suddenly upon a group of men in a narrow defile.

Masters dug his heels into the pony's flanks and rode in among them, raining blows with his stick upon every brown back that came within reach. He slithered to a standstill before two coolies carrying an improvised stretcher—and the former *mandor*, Ho Kwei.

The leader of the revolt awaited him placidly, with an evil expression on the man's broad face, and the barrel of a revolver resting on the crook of his left arm.

The bearers dropped the stretcher and fled precipitately. Prudence, her hands tied behind her, wriggled into a sitting position and turned her head. Masters saw no fear in her eyes—only joy at his coming and unutterable confidence.

There was no question of parley, of anything but immediate and decisive action. He set his mount deliberately at Ho Kwei—and the bullet that sent it rearing up on its hind legs seared Masters's side. The two men and the horse came down in

a heap together, and the assistant, kicking clear of the stirrups, limped painfully to where his assailant lay motionless.

It took him minutes to realize that Ho Kwei was dead. He found himself cutting the girl's bonds with a knife, which he never remembered drawing from his pocket. He helped her to her feet and glanced sidewise at Ho Kwei. On the Chinaman's battered face was the clear imprint of a pony's hoof.

He picked up the man's discarded revolver, and smiled grimly at Prudence.

"And that's that!" he said. "The men will come back now."

She contrived to smile back at him, but her face was very white and she trembled visibly. Masters slipped his arm around her to support her.

"Are you ill?" he inquired anxiously.

She shook her head.

"I was frightened—dreadfully frightened—for you!"

"I was frightened for you," he assured her. "When De Laris told me you had gone off alone, I could have hit him for letting you go!"

Their eyes met.

"Prudence!"

"Yes, Jim?"

"What on earth made you do it? You knew about Ho Kwei."

Her fingers played with the collar of his tunic.

"I don't know. Something dawned on me last night, and I couldn't sleep. A mad impulse drove me into the forest. Somehow I wanted to see that light in your eyes again. I wanted to see you fight—for me. Something told me that you would come!"

Masters surveyed her gravely.

"It seems to me, young woman," he said, "that it's time you had somebody to look after you!"

V

GAYLOR came up on Masters's veranda and approached the long chair in which his assistant was reclining.

"How's that hit in your side?" he asked.

Masters laughed.

"Almost well," he replied. "If it wasn't for that fool of a doctor, I should be up and doing."

"Ah!" said Gaylor, pulling forward a chair. "Fit enough to answer a few questions, eh? Where did you manage an estate before?"

"Sumatra—five years ago."

"I thought so. Did you resign, or were you fired?"

"Both," said Masters.

"How do you mean?"

"I went home against orders."

The manager seemed perplexed.

"I've big things in view for you, Masters, but I want to be sure of my ground

first. You say you went to England without authority. You don't make a habit of that sort of thing, I hope?"

The old familiar smile had crept into the assistant's face.

"I was working for a Dutch syndicate," he said, "and there happened to be a war on at the time."

A Do-It-Now Young Man

HERE WAS A CRISIS THAT DEMANDED SPEED, AND YOUNG MR. APPLETON WAS IN HIS BEST COMET-LIKE MOOD

By Gertrude Pahlow

THUS James Appleton chanted to himself, bee lining from his office to the subway:

"The subway is an awful place; I like it.
It swallows up each human grace; I like it.
It leaves no time for thought or prayer,
It grabs the hat right off your hair; I like it!"

By grace of a subway express he could, now at nearly noontime, interview a contractor on lower Broadway, look at the building he was putting up on Twelfth Street, and get back to the office in time to turn out the reports on his findings before luncheon.

He ran down the steps at Thirty-Third Street, caromed briskly off two or three emerging subway-farers, glimpsed an express pausing briefly for breath, and dashed up to it as if he were carrying the good news from Aix to Ghent.

The door that he reached was one of those sliding doors amidships of the car that operate by some sinister power of their own, independent of human aid. It was beginning to close, and he flung himself in with the expert twist of the toughened subway addict.

But as he congratulated himself on scoring a point on the familiar monster, he noted with the tail of his eye that there was a traveler beside him who was likely to lose the battle. The iron jaws were closing fast, and a wriggling girl with a hand bag was about to be stuck in their midst.

It is one of the subtle minor effects of the subway habit that the train just departing, even though it is immediately to be followed by a train exactly as noisy, as crowded and as malodorous, seems precious and desirable beyond any other train.

It was shocking to Appleton's subway-trained sensibilities that any one who had almost boarded an express should be left behind, or perhaps half left behind and half carried on. He had caught it, and the next aspirant had a right to the same boon.

He was a do-it-now young man. He seized the door in one hand and the girl in the other, gave a push to the first and a pull to the second, and when, an instant later, the door closed irrevocably and the train rushed on its way, there rushed with it a saved human soul who would otherwise have been left behind in outer darkness.

The car was loaded to the gunwales, and Appleton and his salvage were wedged together like dancing partners. He bent his head downward and sidewise, serpent-fashion, to see around the brim of her hat and reap her look of gratitude.

Very discreetly he did this, for when a damsel, until a moment ago a total stranger, is firmly impacted against your waistcoat buttons, subtlety in the intellectual approaches is needed to strike a proper balance; but that glance of passionate gratitude was, he felt, his due.

It came as a distinct shock to him to

meet, under the hat brim, a pair of hazel eyes blazing with an emotion as near hatred as can be expressed in a formal place like the subway.

"Now what in *thunder*," demanded the rescued one, in a low but intense voice, "did you do that for?"

"Wh-why," stammered Appleton, completely taken aback, "I wanted to help you get on!"

"Help me get on!" repeated the girl. "I was trying with all my might to get off!" Her tone suggested that she would have liked to add, "You poor stiff!" but was too polite to do so without the formality of an introduction.

II

APPLETON blinked; it seemed to be one of those misunderstandings which no apt repartee can save. It had never occurred to him that she could wish to abandon a train that he had been so pleased to enter. After a moment's blank pause he murmured: "I'm awfully sorry. I'm *awfully* sorry, truly."

"I'm glad you're sorry," said the girl coldly. "And now, if you don't object, I'd like to get next the door and stand some chance of getting out this stop. Quick, please."

"This stop—" said Appleton uncomfortably, "but there isn't any. I mean, we're on an express; it doesn't stop at all until Fourteenth Street."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the girl. "And my train goes in ten minutes!" Consternation wiped even the wrath from her face, and she stared at him blankly.

Appleton's rapid do-it-now brain flashed into computations. From Thirty-Third Street to Fourteenth Street must take about three minutes; one *might* get to the other side and get an uptown train in two minutes; three minutes back again—through the subway into the railroad station—well, it would certainly be a near thing, but with exceptional luck and lavish use of the elbow it might possibly be done. Undoubtedly it would need some doing.

"Do you know the Pennsylvania Station well?" he asked.

"I've never been in it. I just came to the city this morning, and lost my way trying to get over from the Grand Central by that awful shuttle train. I'm half an hour later than I promised to be—*without* this performance."

"Then you must let me take you. Unless you know the very quickest way, you haven't a chance."

"Thank you, I think you've already done quite enough for me. I can manage alone."

"Really, you can't. This place is a regular what-d'you-call-it—place they kept the Whosis in—labyrinth, you know. You'll *have* to let me help you."

"I've had *enough* of your help, I tell you. If I lose my train—"

"You *will* lose it unless I go with you. And I'm *going*."

Though compacted together like lovers or sardines, they were both speaking now, in voices tense with rage, she furious at his interference, he at her pig-headedness. Any one observing them—so young and personable a pair, murmuring so earnestly and low—would have supposed them to be plighting vows; whereas it was only the opportune stopping of the train that prevented them from biting each other's ears.

"*Four-teen!*" yelled a voice, distant but menacing.

"Come on!" cried Appleton; and seizing the girl by the arm, he projected her and himself out of the opening door, through the group of aspirants clustered outside it, and half across the platform in a rush.

III

So far, mindful of the teachings absorbed at his mother's knee, he had abstained from the cruder forms of subway etiquette; but he had played football in school. Brushing aside all opposing travelers, he hauled the girl swiftly along the down town platform, up the stairs, across the upper passageway, and down the other stairs to the uptown platform.

At this favored spot you may, either by the oversight of man or the beneficence of God, go from one side to the other without passing through a turnstile or parting with a nickel. The subway-farers here were a cowed and pusillanimous lot; he tossed them this way and that with ease.

An uptown express thundered in just as, towing the girl, he galloped down the stairs; he flung her aboard, wedged himself in after her, and faced her triumphantly, with a good ten seconds to spare before the doors closed.

"Some traveling!" he ejaculated, his cheerfulness restored by the achievement.

"If you call that traveling," returned the girl, as coldly as a feminine person can speak who is trying to catch her breath and reclaim her hat from a rakish perch over one eye. "It seemed more like being blown up by TNT to me."

"It was a great demonstration of the power of man over a primal force. Now we prepare for the next stop. Where is it you're taking a train to?"

Her angry hazel eyes flickered away from him with a suggestion of uneasiness.

"B-baltimore," she answered.

"Then you want the noon express to Washington. Good. I know the place that goes from like the little house where I was born, because I took it myself last week. Have you got your ticket?"

Her eyes flickered again, coming swiftly back to his face and leaving it as swiftly.

"My—the friend I'm traveling with has it," she said; and somehow the upper part of her face—the only portion of her within his range of vision—looked guilty.

Appleton began to have an impression that there was something about this journey not quite according to Hoyle. But of course that was not his affair; all he had to do was to make up the deficit in her schedule that he had caused.

"All right," he said. "Get close to the door, and be ready to leap through the first crack. You may think we got up speed on the last stretch, but I assure you we were snails compared to what we'll be on this. And I warn you there won't be any time for polite conversation. Even if you think I'm taking you by way of Albany, yours not to reason why, you know. Just trust me, and I'll shoot you to your train as straight as a pretzel."

"I think I could do it myself," the girl declared rebelliously.

"Then you think wrong," returned Appleton firmly. "Your only chance of getting that train is to follow me like the Constitution following the flag."

"*Thoit-Thoid!*" shouted the guard, shutting off her further protest with a vehemence that made her jump; and Appleton closed the conversation by the simple expedient of seizing her in one hand, her bag in the other, and ejecting the lot of them into the maelstrom.

IV

THIS time it was football under difficulties. To go from the Thirty-Third

Street subway stop to the Pennsylvania tracks is not a simple undertaking on Friday at midnight; and to take that perilous and popular journey on Saturday at noon, with two minutes to do it in, is to be a combination of mole and catapult, requiring all the best features of both.

Apparently the entire population of these United States had just come to New York by way of the Pennsylvania Station, and was bent on leaving it by the subway; and these were not the flaccid, yielding subway-farers of Fourteenth Street, but stern and ruthless opponents who gave blow for blow. It was like carrying the ball down a muddy field through heavy interference.

But Appleton set his teeth and plunged doggedly on. First the girl, and then the bag, was wrenched from his grasp, but he reclaimed both in grim silence and pursued his course. At the corner of a shiny white corridor a smallish man butted him violently in the stomach with a very hard head, but he did not even stop to grunt.

They dashed upstairs and down, through narrow tunnels and across great open spaces; they made even the porters—those hardened beholders of heroic deeds—stare; they dodged a truckload of trunks, tipped over an incautious pedestrian, and emerged, panting, at the required platform.

And the train was gone.

At first they could only stare at the empty place and at each other, gasping. They had no words to say, nor breath to say them with. All their dazed senses could register was the fact that they had run a Marathon, and lost.

But suddenly the girl looked about her with a startled consciousness of something more.

"How long has this train been gone?" she asked a passing porter.

"'Bout a minute, ma'am."

"Is there any other place where—where anybody could wait to meet somebody?"

"Top de stairs, ma'am."

She ran fleetly up the black flight to the stairhead and stood gazing. Obviously there was no one in sight who had any significance for her; even the ticket inspector had withdrawn to whatever dim limbo harbors his kind between inspections.

Appleton, following, saw on her face first a blank astonishment, then a gleam of something like relief, and then a darkness of complete dismay.

"Gone!" she exclaimed, turning to him. "And here I am—no ticket, no money, no place to go, no one to go with. And"—she added vindictively—"it's all your fault!"

Appleton's face reflected her dismay. He had, indeed, made a marvelous mess of things.

"It's no use trying to say how sorry I am," he answered unhappily. "But there's another train to Baltimore in an hour or so. Won't that do?"

"No, no! I don't want to take it."

"Then what about a train for somewhere else? To see some friends?"

"No. I don't want to go visiting."

"Well, it's certainly my duty to get you a ticket for somewhere. How about home?"

"Oh, I *won't!*" she cried with sudden vehemence. "*I will not go home!*"

V

He stood nonplused. She was, indeed, all dressed up with no place to go. He racked his brain, but could think of no plausible suggestion, and she was obviously too indignant to help him.

But there is one resource that is always available in times of doubt; one can nearly always eat or drink; and providentially the fact occurred to him.

"Then let's have lunch," he suggested.

She looked at him coldly and reflectively, during a little pause. Then she said:

"Well, considering that you've messed up my entire life, I think you *do* owe me a luncheon. Thank you, I accept your kind invitation."

"That's the talk," Appleton remarked, relieved to be doing something practical. "Right this way; first aid while you wait."

So saying, he goaded her gently but swiftly out of the building and across the street, and in five minutes had her ensconced at a little flower-decked table in the most festive room of the nearest hostelry, with a waiter bowing attendance and food in the offing. Appleton was a do-it-now young man.

Setting the flowers aside, he looked at the girl across the excellent luncheon, and really saw her for the first time. She was, as he realized at once, distinctly worth seeing. She was straightly slender, and deftly clad in something tan-colored; her hazel eyes were shadowed by brows and lashes of a darker brown, and her hair—what lit-

tle of it showed beneath the trig little tan-colored hat—was dusty brown-gold like a child's.

She was very pretty, and very appealing in some subtle way which had nothing to do with beauty; and she was very young. He felt acutely responsible for her, yet not at all resentful of the responsibility.

"I say, I'm sorry as the deuce that I gummed up your plans, and I'm going to make some new ones for you right away," he said earnestly. "What do you *want* to do?"

Her eyes, which had been avidly drinking in all the color and movement of the place, came back to his with a look of wistful eagerness.

"Please—for this little while—I just want not to worry!" she answered. "I worried to-day, about coming here, about going—on—until I didn't know if I was a bad dream or a case of amnesia. And everything went wrong—and yet I'm here, after all, in this wonderful place! And now I'm so happy that all I want is to change the subject."

It seemed, indeed, that she had changed not only the subject, but the whole mood of their intercourse. In the roar of the subway and the stress of their struggles he had had an impression that her disposition was vicious; but now, gazing wide-eyed and wondering and friendly at his hospitality and at him, she seemed distinctly sweet. He continued to look at her.

"Make it any subject you like," he said, "and I'll indorse it. It's up to me to dig this day out of the discard for you."

"Oh, you're doing it!" she cried. "This, you know—the people, the music, the pretty clothes—it's what I've wanted more than a harp and a crown. Is it always like this—every day? I've never been in New York before."

"Never been in New York before!" exclaimed Appleton, shocked with the horror of the Western-born New Yorker. "Oh, then you've lots to do. What do you like—theaters, music, pictures, dancing—?"

"I like *anything*," she said vehemently, "that's life! I've been buried ever since I can remember, and now I've dug myself up to see life. And I'm *going* to!"

"There's more life in one square inch of New York," averred Appleton, "than in three thousand acres of any other place, bar none. But how did you get that way? You look as if you belonged here."

"I do; I *do* belong here, I've always known it. But I'm an orphan, and I have to live with my guardian in a little graveyard town up the State; and he calls New York—what is it he calls it?—I ought to know, I've heard it often enough—oh, yes, the Modern Babylon. Or else the Scarlet Woman. That made me want to come more than anything—it's such a pretty name, like Carmen in a red evening cloak."

VI

SHE smiled at him confidently, and her face became enchanting. Then she went on earnestly: "If we'd been poor, if he'd needed me there to help shoo off the wolf, I wouldn't have minded a bit. But my guardian has lots of money, and next year, when I'm of age, I'll have quite a lot myself. There was nothing for me to do; and I've moldered in that awful, gloomy old house—reading *Vanity Fair*, and thinking about coming to the city—until—until now I'm here!"

She suddenly brushed away dull care with a gay little gesture, and looked about her with starry eyes.

"You bet you're here; and now we'll make up for lost time," he declared. "Let's see, it's too early for a *matinée*; but as soon as we've finished lunch we'll go and look in at Caro's, or the Quatres Arts, for celebrities; and then we'll get tickets for a *revue*."

"Oh, just the names are almost enough! Do you think we'll see any actresses or movie stars? Oh, no matter what happens—no matter *how* it turns out—"

In the midst of her happy animation, in full flood of her eager speech, she suddenly caught her breath, bit her lip, and stared wide-eyed at the doorway. The exuberant color that had begun to flood her face drained away, leaving her drawn and aghast.

"What is it?" exclaimed Appleton, alarmed.

"Some one—some one I don't want to see—looking for me," she whispered. "He's standing in the door. He's coming in. Hide me—oh, hide me *quick*!"

Appleton's do-it-now proclivities leaped up like Job's war horse at the scent of battle. He cast a rapid glance about, saw a cluster of palms screening a service entrance, and whisked her briskly into its shelter.

But no sooner had they gained it than

she, peering between the fronds, whispered, "He's coming this way!" So, without hesitation, he pushed open the swing door, pulled her through, and swung it shut behind him.

"There!" he said. "He won't look here. Don't worry; you're all right." He put a protecting arm around her shoulders, for he felt very responsible for her.

She cowered against him. "Oh, thank you, thank you!" she murmured. "I felt as if I just couldn't bear to have him see me. He'd make me—" She broke off abruptly.

"He shan't make you do anything you don't want to," soothed Appleton. "Shall I go and put him out?"

"No; oh, no! He mustn't see you either. He—I know you think it's very strange for me to be hiding from some one like this. I know I ought to explain. I—you see, I've been desperate to get away from that awful place—I told you that—and so I—I—"

Her courage seemed to fail her for a minute; then she gathered it together and went on with a rush. "I stole from my guardian to get the money—stole a jewel."

"Stole a jewel!" repeated Appleton. He was completely staggered, but did not remove his arm; for if she were a criminal, she stood in the greater need of protection.

"It wasn't exactly stealing," she qualified. "You see—it's—it's a jewel that belonged to my mother, that I'll have anyway when I'm twenty-one. And he'd hardly let me have any money at all; *that's* true. And I'll pay it back. But that man—that man's the special policeman in our town—my guardian sent him after me—and he *mustn't* see me! He mustn't—arrest me!"

"Great Scott, I should say not!" said Appleton, tightening his hold; he couldn't let his responsibility go to jail.

At this tense moment a waiter came speeding to the door with a loaded tray, and nearly bumped into them.

"*Sapristi!*" he exclaimed with heat. Then, perceiving their aspect of quality and prosperity, he added more mildly: "Cannot loaf here, lady and gent. This door for eats. Dining room for loafers. Go in."

"Can't," explained Appleton rapidly. "Man in there. Got to get out, see? How?"

A brotherly gesture, from one palm to

another, assisted in making the situation clear to the alien child, and he nodded eagerly like a conspirator.

"Go by da wall, round da right, down da stairs. So you come to grill room; den you get out. Anabody say anathing, you say you my brodder. See? Now you beat it, quick!"

VII

FOLLOWING this advice they soon found themselves in a subterranean corridor from which they emerged by an easy flight of steps to the street level; and here they fled out of the nearest door. A taxi was just drawing up to discharge a passenger. Appleton hailed it, bundled the girl inside, directed the chauffeur to drive them to the park, and banged the door.

But, as they began to buzz into motion, the girl gave a squeak of dismay. "Oo—he saw us!" she cried. "He came to the door just as we were getting in! He'll get another cab; he'll follow us!"

She put up her hand to draw the shade over the rear window, but Appleton stopped her firmly. He was having a wonderful time; this kind of emergency was just what suited his energetic make-up.

"Don't do that!" he commanded. "We'd be as easy to follow as a hearse. Squeeze back into the corner, where he can't see you, and we'll hustle out of his range." He tapped on the glass behind the chauffeur's ear, and cried briskly: "Drive like blazes!"

This, however, was easier to say than do. The street was as full of traffic as a woman's closet of shoes. Trucks and taxis and private cars elbowed and shoved them, trolley cars zoomed them off the tracks; and when they reached Thirty-Fourth Street the north-bound traffic was stopped, and they were held tight and helpless in the waiting mass.

"Oh, oh!" cried the girl, wringing her hands. "This settles it! He had plenty of time to get our number; before this he's got a cab, and now he can't help catching us red-handed!"

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Appleton. "There are one or two ways to foil him yet, short of suicide. Take off your hat and scout with one eye, and see if he's in the cab behind us."

She obeyed, her bright short hair tumbling about her forehead, and reported with a shake of her head that he was not.

"Then put on your hat, keep your head down, and follow me," directed the born executive; and jumping nimbly out, he whisked her around a truck, in front of a sedan, and into an empty taxi.

"There," he added triumphantly. "That's a device frequently used by the criminal classes. It's called a flip-flop, or something of the sort."

She gazed at him with the hazel eyes wide and worshipful. "I think you're a wonder," she said earnestly.

"No, no. Just an opportunist," he disclaimed; but he glowed with the inner warmth which always pervaded him after a brisk exhibition of derring-do-it-now.

The traffic policeman's whistle sounded, and their driver, who had contemplated their arrival out of nowhere with surprise and suspicion, demanded a destination.

"Does that chap know you want to see gay life?" asked Appleton of the girl.

She shivered a little. "Yes. Oh, yes; he knows that."

Appleton turned to the chauffeur. "Drive to the Natural History Museum," he said, "and drive as if you'd get a ten-dollar bill by reaching there inside of ten minutes."

The car bounded forward, threading its way between and past the other vehicles like an inspired serpent. The two conspirators looked at each other and giggled.

"They'll have fleet taxis who follow," said young Do-it-now.

VIII

THERE is no place in the world less fretted by the gay whirl of modern life—with the possible exception of the Catacombs at Rome—than the dignified Museum of Natural History.

To some temperaments it might seem almost too depressingly sedative; but it had no such effect on our two adventurers. They sat happily among the bones of mammoths, and rested from their hurrys, and talked about themselves.

They seemed, suddenly, to be very old friends. They told each other their names, and what they had been doing before they met. And what they were going to do in the future. Her name was Doris Grey, and she meant to do something great and beautiful with her life.

"When I started out," she confessed, "I didn't want a thing but to get away from that horrible place, and be gay. But

I've learned better now; I want to study hard, and paint great, beautiful pictures, the way you build great beautiful buildings, to last forever. It must be the bones that changed my point of view, they're so serious and lasting. I like bones; we didn't have any in Stowe."

"Nothing lasts forever—not even bones," said Appleton philosophically. "My buildings will be pulled down in ten years; your paintings, if you paint 'em, will get buried in New York dust. But the thing is to be working, not just collecting moths and rust. That's what made you unhappy in Stowe. You're like me, you see; you want to do something, and you want to do it now."

"So I do. But I never knew it until I met you. This has been a very educational day; it seems a long time since morning."

The fact thus called to his attention, Appleton became aware that it did seem a long time since morning; and for the excellent reason that it *was* a long time. The sun came slantwise through the high dusty windows, and somewhere a clock struck four.

He realized with a start that he had missed two appointments of some importance, and had better hurry if he were to avoid missing a third; and there was a train for somewhere-or-other to be found for the girl.

Faint but recurrent pangs of hunger began to enter into the situation, too, for they had both done scant justice to that excellent luncheon. Yet he still sat there with the mastodon bones and Doris, exchanging confidences; and of all the things that had to be done, that seemed the most important.

After awhile she lifted to him her hazel eyes full of a trouble that had been shadowing them increasingly. They looked quite different from the eyes that had seared him with lightnings only this morning; he had looked into them a great many times since then, and the more he looked the more he was apt to look again.

"There's something I want to tell you," she said in a low voice. "At least I don't want to, but I must. I—I—oh, I hate to say it."

"Go on, tell me," encouraged Appleton. "I won't let you go to the electric chair—or to solitary confinement, either. You've confessed one crime to me, and all it did was to make me want to get you out of danger."

"This isn't a crime; it's worse—it's a foolishness," she said, nerving herself to an effort. "You know I told you I was bored stiff at home in Stowe. And I'd have done anything to get away. And—and so—I'm *not* as silly as it sounds—but truly I was desperate—I—I— Oh!" She broke off suddenly in her floundering explanation, and for the second time that day panic distended her eyes. "Oh, look!"

He looked, but saw nothing alarming, only the bones and a stray sight-seer or two.

"What is it?" he asked, instinctively protecting her with his arm. "Did you see that special policeman again?"

"Worse than that—I saw my guardian! Oh, if he sees me it's *all* over!"

IX

You know Appleton well enough by this time to know what sort of reaction this sort of emergency would produce in him. He cast one glance around, saw that the only available exit was blocked by the gaunt middle-aged figure in the next room, swished her rapidly behind the exhibit on whose edge they were sitting, skirted the room, and shoved her into an alcove. Here, crowded cosily in behind a young dinosaur, they clung together and peered out at the enemy.

"He's coming in!" whispered the girl. "Oh, now I've *got* to tell you. You'll despise me, too. When I said—what I said at luncheon—I told a lie; the first lie I ever told—we-ell, maybe the second. I didn't steal any jewel, and that man wasn't a policeman. He's a man I met last week at Stowe, and I came here to—to elope with him."

Appleton looked at her as sternly as it is possible to look at a lovely girl who is jammed against your ribs by the skeleton of a young dinosaur.

"Why did you do that?" he demanded in a stern whisper.

"Oh, I don't know. I was so wild with restlessness, so crazy to get away—and my guardian wouldn't let me do a *thing*, or marry *anybody*, though there was one of the boys I used to want to. And he said he'd give me all the fun there was in New York. The trip to B-baltimore was just a ruse to throw off pursuers; we were going to be married in Philadelphia, and come back and go to a cabaret to-night."

"Did you—did you—like him a lot?"

asked Appleton. The question somehow stuck in his throat.

"I thought I did. It was at a dance, you see, and the lights and the music and everything—and he danced like a dream—and he promised me all I'd been wanting. But when I got to the station and found he hadn't waited for me, I didn't like him at all; and when I got to the restaurant, and found he *had* waited—to spy on me—I *hated* him!"

Appleton's arms tightened about her in instinctive approbation of her judgment. That was one foe eliminated; but the creaking tread of the guardian, leaving his inspection of prehistoric reptiles' eggs and moving on into the room reminded him of the imminence of another.

"But how d'you suppose your guardian got on your track?" he whispered.

"Oh, he isn't really on my track, he's on his own. I left a note that I'd eloped. He knew I wanted to come to New York, and when you hunt for a person who might be anywhere, you hunt first in the places you'd go to yourself. That man would hunt for me in cabarets; guardy would hunt here and at the Aquarium and Grant's tomb."

X

APPLETON was profoundly impressed by this remark; the girl was as wise as she was beautiful. A rare girl; a trifle impetuous, perhaps, but a sane, steady-going person could educate her out of that. With characteristic deliberation he made up his mind.

"Look here," he whispered in her ear, "he's coming, and we have to decide what to do. He knows you came here to elope, so he's all prepared. Why unsettle him again, at his age? Why not just stay here and elope with me?"

"With you? Oh—!"

"Do, Doris! Do, little lovely Doris! I love you, Doris; I've been doing it all day; I do it more every minute. Doris, darling, you don't hate me the way you hate that other chap, do you?"

"N-no. It—it was because—I saw you—that—that I began to hate him."

"You darling! Say yes, then. Say it quick. He's coming! Doris—say, 'Yes, Jim,'"

"Yes, Jim," whispered Doris obediently.

"Yea—ea!" exclaimed Appleton, with an exuberance that made the guardian and the bones jump nervously; and giving her a rapid but hearty squeeze, he haled her forth from behind the young dinosaur and projected her and himself into the guardian's path.

"How do you do, sir," he said, briskly. "My name is James Appleton. I'm assistant manager of the Mellish Construction Company, with a salary of ten thousand dollars, hoping for a raise next year. I'm a Tech graduate, and a churchgoer. I'm going to marry your ward, and we're going to live, after the twenty-first of this month, at 6 East Twelfth Street, in a building which I shall have ready for occupancy on that date. If you consent, we'll be married to-morrow; if you refuse, we'll have to wait until I can make special arrangements, she being under age. But I'm going to marry her anyhow."

The guardian, during this comprehensive speech, had been looking his prospective ward-in-law over with shrewd and twinkling eyes. He now astonished Appleton by coming forward with his hand outstretched.

"My boy, take her and welcome!" he said, heartily. "I'm getting old for so much responsibility, and I'm tickled to pieces to have her marry a nice upstanding young man that knows his own mind. Trouble with those fellows at home, they were all shillyshallyers. You marry her to-day, and I can get back to Stowe to-morrow in comfort."

Appleton blinked once, shook the guardian's hand twice, and bent over and kissed Doris Grey three times.

"Well, that goes to show," he remarked, drawing a long breath of achievement, "that if you have a thing to do, there's nothing like doing it now."

JOY

Joy—what is joy more than a fleeting shadow

Elusive as a breath—

A ceaseless search for some dim Eldorado

Found, it may be, in death?

Clinton Scollard

The Delightful Unknown

SHE WAS ONLY A LITTLE COUNTRY GIRL AND HE WAS FROM THE CITY—BUT THIS ISN'T THAT KIND OF A STORY

By Gordon Stiles

IT'S a pretty serious matter to be within six weeks of graduation from college and suddenly take double pneumonia, just because your trusty canoe refused to outride the turbulent waters of a spring freshet in the local river.

It is still worse to be cooped up in your bedroom for more than seven weeks, struggling to beat the game and almost losing, at that—what with complications and such.

But worst of all is the doctor's verdict—when a chap is beginning to feel fit as anything, and to eat like a horse—of “at least another month's absolute quiet!” Especially when one is particularly high-spirited and has planned a marvelous summer with one's best friend, fishing and sailing, dancing and fussing—at Nantucket!

There is no gainsaying the fact that James Morton Despard, 2nd, “took it hard,” as the saying goes. He had made a valiant effort to compromise over the last part of the program, offering to be very quiet and careful if allowed to go to Nantucket with Monty Bishop, his chum and roommate.

But it was no go. James Morton Despard, the senior, had put his foot down emphatically. It was a sizable foot, too, and when it once was down it had a habit of remaining there—which fact had been driven home to James Morton Despard, 2nd, on two or three memorable occasions. In this case he sulked a little, but swallowed the pill, and dutifully entrained for Miller's Dam, New York.

There he was met by one Abner Biggs, an uncle by marriage, and jolted in a wagon behind two horses, over three miles of rough road to the Biggs's farm, thereby inaugurating his first visit to these isolated relatives whom he had met only on their annual visits to his father's house in Larch-

mont. The family had frowned upon Aunt Marie marrying a farmer and burying herself in the country.

But Abner Biggs had made her happy; there was no doubt about that. She was a great reader, and loved the quiet of the farm.

Of late years her husband had given up active direction of his estate, which he had reduced by selling, and permitted a neighbor to work most of the land on shares. He was wealthy as country standards go, so there was nothing to worry about.

It was a pleasant enough spot, the Biggs homestead, lying as it did where the tangled slopes of the Ramapos give way to the scrub growth of the foothills, to rich pasture land, and finally to a checkerboard of lush meadows and cultivated fields. But when the wagon passed between the two white stones that marked the entrance of the drive leading from road to house, James Morton Despard, 2nd, felt much as a prisoner behind whom the gates of Sing Sing have clanged.

Still, there was nothing for it but to make the best of the business—which James Morton Despard, 2nd, proceeded to do.

II

THIS warm afternoon in late July found him lolling in a bank of moss atop the eminence known as Walnut Hill, gazing now and then at the country below through a very excellent pair of field glasses, indulging in forbidden cigarettes, and ruminating on the situation in general.

He had adopted the farm hand costume of khaki shirt and trousers as the most suitable garb for prowling the fields and hills, which had been for ten days his only activity, and found it all entirely satisfactory. Already the fierce sun had won a substan-

tial victory over the pallor of the sick room, and any observer would have set the young man down as being right in the pink of condition.

James Morton Despard, 2nd, laid aside his glasses to muse mentally:

"If 'absolute quiet' was what that old tyrant, Dr. Jepson, wanted for me, I'm cussed if he hasn't got it! Also, the paternal ancestor knew what he was about when he shooed me out to this mausoleum. Quiet! If it wasn't for my breathing, you could hear the bellowing of the angle-worms!"

He tallied up:

"Been here two hours and—let's see—two motor cars on that road over the next hill, one going up and the other down; a load of hay going into that red barn in the hollow, a boy on a bicycle, and a woman shaking rugs on the back porch of the farm where the chickens and the truck garden are. That's all, barring cows and birds, that I've seen moving to-day. Well, now to increase the score."

He swept the countryside with his lenses, following the three highways visible, and searching the fields and pastures, elevating the glasses until his eyes were greeted by a solid mass of mountain foliage. A final downward tilt followed. The watcher murmured, "Ah!"

He had picked up something that moved—and moved most satisfactorily, in the estimation of James Morton Despard, 2nd. It was a girl. And she was carrying a pail, presumably full of water, from a near-by well to the back porch, where he had seen the woman shaking rugs.

It was her manner of walking that held Mr. Despard's attention; not a bit like the somewhat sloppy carriage of most of the girls he had come upon in remote spots. There was a freedom, yet a dignity, about the way she moved.

At that distance—it must have been more than a mile—he could not discern her features enough to pass judgment. He could see that she wore a frock of the type known as "bungalow aprons."

He strained his eyes the better to make out her face; she was too far away. But that walk of hers! Oh, boy! He sighed as she disappeared into the house.

III

If the Biggses were surprised by their nephew's line of questioning at the supper

table that evening, they did not show it. Probably they thought nothing of it; small talk, no doubt.

As befits a modern knight who considers entering upon a fresh campaign of conquest; moreover, as befits a young man just emerging from four years of college life and its associations, Mr. Despard was discreet and cautious. One learns those things, you know.

Hence his opening remark: "There's a neat little farm about a mile down the Branton Road. Noticed it through the glasses this afternoon."

"You must mean the Kingsley place," Uncle Abner suggested.

"White house. Yellowish barn. Four beehives in the yard, and some chickens. Orchard and a big vegetable garden. I think, some berries, too."

"That's the place," said Uncle Abner. "It isn't a big place, but it's in good shape. Kingsley can afford to keep it right."

"Who are the Kingsleys?" This in the manner of one making talk. Somewhat listless voice, you know.

"Oh, Kingsley came out from the city seven or eight years ago. Retired from business, I understand. Bought this farm to have something to keep him busy. Good fellow, Kingsley. Nice wife, too. They're away, now. Went to the Thousand Islands for a few weeks. Always do, in the summer, after the hay's in."

James Morton Despard, 2nd, thought awhile. It might be just possible—h-m! In fact, it was probable.

"Just the two of them?" he inquired.

Uncle Abner looked up, then. "Why, sure," he answered. "That's all there are. They got no children."

The nephew cogitated some more. *That* possibility was shot, anyhow. A visitor, perhaps. Out again! Not likely a visitor would be there with the family away, or that she would be toting water. He itched to find out more, but decided to limit himself to a single additional question at this time.

"Who looks after the place when they're gone?"

"Old Mrs. Hemmingway. She's worked for 'em for years. Better than two men, she is."

Rats! Doubtless the graceful creature revealed by the glasses was the daughter of the said Mrs. Hemmingway. But he'd postpone further interrogation on the sub-

ject for the present. It would be wiser. Even a collegian might talk himself into conversational difficulties.

IV

At an astonishingly early hour next morning, James Morton Despard, 2nd, was at his post on Walnut Hill. And no military observer ever kept a given point under a more conscientious surveillance than that to which the Kingsley farm was subjected by that curious young person. His vigilance was plentifully rewarded, too. The chronological order of events was, roughly, as follows:

At nine thirty-five—Mr. Despard went on duty at nine twenty—the graceful Unknown carried a bucket of something or other out to the chicken run. It was clear that the lenses had not lied the evening before; she appeared more fetching than ever.

When next he saw her, at ten forty, she had undergone a change of costume. Now she wore knickers, and he soon perceived the reason.

Accompanied by the woman whom he had seen torturing the rugs on the previous day, she stood for a moment, evidently peering into the branches of a tree that stood in the side yard. Then both went to the barn, to reappear, each at one end of a tall ladder.

The woman brought tin buckets from the house, and together they raised the ladder against the tree. The Unknown mounted smartly, and presently was merged in the green of the branches. At intervals thereafter she descended the ladder with a bucket filled with cherries, he supposed.

At twelve o'clock she went into the house, and James Morton Despard, 2nd, was reminded that lunch time was imminent. These were days when he was skipping no meals, so he made the best of his way home, more impressed than ever by the charms of the Unknown, even though he had seen her only at a distance.

He did not return to Walnut Hill after lunch; instead, he strolled slowly down the Branton Road with quite the air of a man who has no objective. Once out of the range of the four Biggs eyes, however, he quickened his pace. He was on a reconnoitering expedition, and the three miles or so which the trip to and from the Kingsley place represented, did not act as a deterrent to a determined soul.

This journey may be dismissed in a word.

It was utterly fruitless. Four times he had passed the Kingsley house and had seen no signs of life at all. Thus it was a tired and somewhat disgusted young man who reported about the time broiled chicken and green apple pie took their appointed place on the Biggs menu.

From his vantage point on the hill, next morning, young Mr. Despard saw something which indicated to him that his luck was turning. It was the Unknown, attired in her tree-climbing regalia, bareheaded, starting off at a smart walking pace along the Branton Road. But she was traveling, not toward Branton, but toward the Biggs farm!

A couple of letters in her hand offered convincing evidence that her destination was the post office at Miller's Dam. Which made it nice for James Morton Despard, 2nd.

The road to Walnut Hill joined the Branton road at a point about a mile from the Kingsley place. The fork was less than half a mile from where the spying schemer sat.

Thus he could give her five or ten minutes' start, stroll leisurely down the hill, and meet his quarry at the crossroads. Excellent! He could size up this queen in disguise and make it seem a casual meeting, with his well-known skill.

The plan worked to perfection—at least, the first part of it. He timed his steps so well that he sauntered up to the junction at exactly the proper instant. And as he did so he saw that the glasses had not done the girl justice. Never, anywhere, had James Morton Despard, 2nd, looked upon so beautiful a creature! He knew that at once.

He knew, too, that he had been observed by her as they approached the fork in the road; she had glanced at him and, besides, he could *feel* that she was looking him over. Good sign, he thought.

And he was totally unprepared for what followed. His plan was sound, he was sure—the casual friendliness of the country, and all that. In such communities strangers always spoke to each other, he understood. Naturally—

At a distance of some six feet, and while their courses were still at right angles, he said, genially: "Good morning."

To his amazement, the Unknown barely nodded her head—jerkily, at that—and

quicken her pace. Before James Morton Despard, 2nd, could pull himself together, she was yards away and setting what he was certain would constitute a walking record for the Ramapo Valley.

"Whew!" exclaimed Mr. Despard. And again, "Whew!"

What on earth was the matter with her, anyway? He had merely tried to be civil. And she had acted as if he were a suspicious character, something to flee from.

So he stood there stupidly, looking after her, with a confused vision of violet eyes set among features so perfect that they would have intrigued the most exacting artist—all beneath wavy auburn hair from which, even now, the sun glinted mockingly. Once more he was compelled to admiration of her splendid carriage and physical perfection. He watched ruefully as she disappeared around a turn without once looking back.

V

As everybody knows, a man of twenty-two, especially a college man, is not easily balked. And the more he thought about it, the more the beauty of the Unknown haunted him, the more set became the jaw and determination of James Morton Despard, 2nd. His pride had suffered. Not only that, he had a great desire to know this perfect creature, to talk to her, to—perhaps, and maybe, and who knows—kiss those delightful lips! Gosh! Something had to be done!

Inspiration was not long in coming. As a matter of fact, it never was—to James Morton Despard, 2nd. He had it all figured out when he went to bed that night. He had heard about similar stunts being pulled off—or he had read about them in books. He'd get busy first thing in the morning.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the day following that he presented himself at the back door of the Kingsley house. He wore his khaki outfit, now somewhat the worse for wear, and congratulated himself because he had not had his hair cut since coming to the country. Best to look the part as much as possible. And to act the part, too.

Therefore, he did not speak in his usual modulated and carefully studied tone when, in reply to the "What d'ye want?" of Mrs. Hemmingway, he said: "Lookin' f'r a job, ma'am."

"Ain't no job here," she told him shortly, and was about to close the door. But the applicant had seen the delightful Unknown sitting by the window, stoning cherries, and he was not to be put off so easily. She looked up curiously, but bent to her work again at once.

"Calc'lated I c'd help with th' cherry pickin'—r berryin'," was his next choice. He had practiced that line and was sure he had the proper inflection and accent—properly nasal, too.

The girl cut in at this point with a brief: "Do it myself."

"Where you been workin'?" demanded Mrs. Hemmingway suspiciously.

"Over t' Abner Biggs's. Don't like it thar. Wanta git a job t' tide me over till apple-pickin' time."

"Huh!" remarked the girl.

"No. We don't want nobody," Mrs. Hemmingway announced.

James Morton Despard, 2nd, seized upon a straw. "Kin I hev a drink o' water?" he asked.

"I guess so," Mrs. Hemmingway remarked grudgingly.

But the object of all the fuss arose to her feet. "I'll git ya one. Thet bucket's tricky," she declared, and led the way to the well.

"Ah!" murmured James Morton Despard, 2nd, to himself as he followed his guide. Matters were progressing, after all. He'd strike up a little friendship now, all right. She was lovely—so lovely that for the moment he forgot the crudeness of her voice and pronunciation.

"Wouldn't hev nothin' t' say t' me, yist'day, would ya?" he began as she was lowering the bucket.

"I wuz goin' t' th' post office," she said.

"I know it, but you coulda walked 'long o' me?"

She giggled and made no reply.

"Why didn't ya?"

"Who be ya?" she asked, still giggling, and shifting from one foot to the other while he pretended to drink thirstily.

James Morton Despard, 2nd, was quite prepared for this. "My name's Pete Marsh," he said. "What's yourn?"

She giggled some more.

"He, he! Mary. Mary Oakley."

"D'ya work here?"

She nodded energetically. "Helpin' Mis' Hemmin'way."

"Say," he was battling against time, "goin' t' th' post office t'day?"

"Dunno. Might. Mebbe 'safternoon."

"Kin I go along? Meetcha by th' cross-ruds." A final giggle came here.

She looked at him, burst into embarrassed laughter, and ran into the house. Feeling as if he had made a fool of himself, James Morton Despard, 2nd, betook himself away to his temporary abode.

Nevertheless, having thought matters over, he repaired to the crossroads after lunch, threw himself on a grassy bank and waited for eventualities.

VI

WHAT followed is not difficult to understand. Mary did go to the post office; James Morton Despard, 2nd, accompanied her.

Her beauty almost floored him; her unadulterated dumbness caused him to marvel that it could possibly flourish in such a setting. But he knew that she liked him, even before that short walk was over. Her eyes showed it; her inherent bashfulness was at its worst—another proof. Oh, James Morton Despard, 2nd, knew his women!

After that there were trips into the fields for huckleberries, meetings by moonlight—evidently Mrs. Hemmingway did not object to her helper's personal inclinations—and when the young man looked at his glorious companion, he worshiped, but when she essayed to talk to him, he squirmed inside and out.

Nevertheless, he kissed her! It happened one night when the world was white with moonlight. For a long time they had sat together on a flat stone beside the barway leading into the Kingsley pasture. Few words had passed; Mr. Despard had fallen into the habit of encouraging her silences. It was less jarring to his finely spun nerves and poetic senses.

And when finally he slipped his arm about her shoulders and drew her lips to his, she yielded eagerly and her arms stole about his neck as she whispered: "Ya do love me, don't ya, Pete?" And "Pete," under the spell of the moment, had said: "'Course I do!"

But it cannot be said that James Morton Despard, 2nd, went to bed with unmixed feelings that night. His conquest was "on ice," he told himself. Yet—yet—somehow, a line from Booth Tarkington's "The Flirt" kept running through his

mind—no, it wasn't quite so bad as that—but the words kept repeating themselves:

"*He kissed an idiot! He kissed an idiot!*"

"Bah!" he muttered, as he fell asleep.

From then on, he noticed a change in Mary's attitude. She was a glutton for affection, so to speak. Her dumb adoration showed in her eyes every time she looked at him; he wished she wouldn't, sometimes. At other times he didn't care.

And she expected him to kiss her at every opportunity, which was often. Not that James Morton Despard, 2nd, did not enjoy it—up to a certain point. What worried him was her assumption that he was as keen as she about it. Oh, well. He'd be off in another week. His term would expire then.

One day he ventured, at the table: "That's a dog-goned pretty girl that works over at Kingsley's, isn't she?"

"Who's working there now?" inquired Uncle Abner.

"Name's Mary Oakley, I believe, somebody told me."

Aunt Marie chipped in: "Yes. She's quite a pretty girl. But—well, she's not considered what you might call 'sharp.' Too bad."

"Isn't she?" inquired James Morton Despard, 2nd, innocently.

"No. It's in the family. And the strange thing about it is that there are three girls and all just the same. Pretty, but—"

"Dumb!" finished the nephew.

"That's it," smiled Aunt Marie.

VII

JAMES MORTON DESPARD, 2ND, was going home, back to the city and to his father's house in Larchmont. Thence to Nantucket for the fag end of the holiday he had planned. He was in excellent spirits.

There was the matter of saying good-by to Mary, to be sure. And a parting kiss or two would not be unwelcome. He had told her that he had got a new place in Jersey and, in view of her repeated assurances of her love, he had been a little surprised that she had taken the news so calmly. He had not mentioned the date of his departure; but he would tell her tonight that he must leave this vicinity early in the morning.

They met at their favorite rendezvous, the barway, embraced and sat down to talk. After awhile Mr. Despard said:

"Gotta git back early t'night. Goin' t' Jersey in th' mornin'."

"T'morrer?" she asked, incredulously, and threw her arms about him.

"Yeah. T'morrer!"

"Well, Pete," she said in a low voice, "whatcha want me t' do? Want me t' go with ya—r was you comin' back f'r me? I'm a'ready!"

"Wh-a-a-a-t?" he exploded, taken utterly unawares.

"W'y, Pete," she exclaimed, with a touch of reproach in her tone, "we're gonna git married, ain't we? We're engaged, ain't we?"

James Morton Despard, 2nd, gasped. He made a brave effort to find himself, to coördinate his brain cells. Finally he said: "Why, not as I know on!"

Mary threw herself upon him in a fit of weeping. Her voice choked with sobs, half hysterical.

"Y-y-ya s-s-s-aid ya loved me an'—an'—an'—I thought—oh, Pete, Pete, Pete!" She arose and fled toward the Kingsley house.

Relief riding above all other feelings, James Morton Despard, 2nd, walked slowly home.

"Oh, Lord," he murmured. "To think she thought I was—oh, my word!" Then he laughed a little; he couldn't help it.

VIII

THAT first week at Nantucket was glorious; only one who has been barred for an extended period from the pleasures of his kind can understand just how glorious. Monty killed a fresh "fatted calf" every day, and James Morton Despard, 2nd, set himself to the agreeable task of making up for lost time.

Then that devilish letter came!

It had been forwarded from Larchmont, and the envelope bore the inscription, in the upper left hand corner:

Myron T. Shailer,
Attorney at Law
Eureka Building, New York

James Morton Despard, 2nd, tore it open carelessly. He idly wondered who this Shailer was and what the letter contained. As he read, his expression changed from curiosity to astonishment, then to incredulity, and he ended by staring fixedly at the signature, as a man in a trance. Monty, who sat near by, saw that something was

amiss. "What's up, Jim?" he inquired, casually.

"Look! My gosh! See for yourself!" He held out the letter. Monty read:

JAMES MORTON DESPARD, 2ND,
(Otherwise known as Peter Marsh),
4 Blank Road, Larchmont, N. Y.:

Dear Sir—My client, Miss Mary Oakley, of Miller's Dam, New York, has requested that I communicate with you in regard to the situation obtaining between her and you.

Her contention is that, after proposing holy matrimony to her, you took the unusual and, I may add, the not very commendable course of refusing the engagement and leaving hurriedly for an unknown destination.

Further, the use of an assumed name in winning the affections of an innocent young girl must be viewed with disfavor, if, indeed, it is not punishable under the penal code of the State of New York.

Nevertheless, my client is willing to overlook this deception, undoubtedly practiced by you for your own personal ends, and is ready to carry out her part of the agreement. My object in writing is to ascertain your intentions in the matter. Therefore, I shall appreciate it if you will advise me by return of mail if you are ready to assume the obligations which you took upon yourself—in short, if you are ready to abide by your promises and marry my client.

Yours truly,

MYRON T. SHAILER.

"Wow!" exclaimed Monty. Then he burst into irreverent laughter. "Oh, boy! What has the child been up to? Even in the sticks! Laddybuck—you picked a wrong 'un, that time! Oy! What a mess!"

"Shut up, you fool!" snapped James Morton Despard, 2nd. "Use your bean. What am I going to do about this?"

"First, you might slip us a few of the details."

Mr. Despard did so, omitting nothing that he could remember, and at the finish Monty assured him: "Looks to me as if you are stung. Her word against yours. And as you say, she's pretty enough so that a jury could understand a man losing his head and falling for her, while the fact that she is dumb will work up sympathy for the poor kid! The best bet for you is to ask: 'How much?' and tap dad for the cash. That's my opinion."

James Morton Despard, 2nd, glared at his friend. "I'm damned if I will. What does she take me for? A sucker?"

"Apparently. And with cause," consoled Monty. His chum flung himself angrily away, went to his room, and composed a hot denial of Miss Mary Oakley's statements, in toto. This was duly posted.

The reply was what might be termed instantaneous. Mr. Shailer had been instructed to bring forthwith a suit against Mr. Despard for breach of promise to marry! Damages would be claimed in the sum of fifty thousand dollars! Would Mr. Despard accept service or designate an attorney to act for him?

Or possibly, Mr. Shailer wrote, it would be better for Mr. Despard to return to New York, call on Mr. Shailer and talk the matter over. Mr. Shailer would expect an immediate response.

"Blackmail!" chorused the two friends. But Mr. Despard took the train.

IX

DIRE misgivings accompanied the traveler on his journey. And every mile that rolled away brought fresh conviction that Monty's consoling remark, in parting: "Wish you luck, old chap. But I'm afraid you're in for it," was the real summary of the situation.

He squirmed as a series of pictures passed in review before his tortured mind. The guffaws of his friends—men and girls alike—when it became known that James Morton Despard, 2nd, was the defendant in such a case! Their further contemptuous merriment when they learned what was bound to come out—that the girl was "dumber" than the Dora of the song!

Panic fell upon him as he thought of James Morton Despard, Senior. The best he could hope for was a monetary settlement, and he had no illusions as to the ability of a shyster lawyer when it came to putting on the screws. He shuddered as he recalled scenes incident to certain occasions when his father had been called upon for diplomatic and financial intercession. He tried to guess what the figure would be; and gave it up in despair and disgust.

Arrived in New York, he telephoned from the station. In the voice of Mr. Shailer he thought he discerned a note of triumph. Mr. Shailer would see him at three o'clock that afternoon.

Until that hour the potential defendant fumed and fussed about aimlessly. He would not go to the club. He didn't want to see anybody there. He shunned his father's office, and broke into cold perspiration at the very thought of it.

When he finally did shoot up in the elevator of the Eureka building and penetrated to the far side of a door on which

the names Dennison & Shailer appeared, he was agreeably surprised to find Mr. Shailer quite the opposite of what he had expected. This young attorney could not be much over thirty and was externally good to look upon—nothing of the shyster about him. The visitor did not know whether to be glad or sorry for that; it might work either way.

Mr. Shailer shook hands with his caller, motioned him to a chair and proffered a cigarette. But his voice grew professionally stern as he opened up on his victim.

"Well, you've got yourself into a sort of mess, haven't you, Mr. Despard?"

"Look here!" blurted Mr. Despard. "That stuff is all bunk!"

"That is for the jury to decide—if you take that attitude," said Mr. Shailer, with a faint smile that infuriated the other.

"You expect me to allow myself to be held up and say nothing, I suppose."

"I object to your terms," was the crisp reply. "You may regard trifling with a young girl not too highly endowed with mentality, as a joke. And you're ready to laugh off that fictitious name, too, I suppose. Well, I asked you to come here for a friendly discussion of the case, but if you insist on blowing up, we may as well let it take its normal course."

"No!" hastily. "I want to settle the case out of court, of course. That is, if it can be done reasonably. Are you prepared to say how much I should have to pay your client to drop these proceedings forthwith?"

Mr. Shailer cleared his throat. "I have talked with my client on the telephone today; she is in the city. And while I personally disapprove of her attitude and would prefer to press the action to the limit, it appears that, in spite of your conduct, she still retains a tender feeling toward you. I look upon her decision as weak and foolish, but she is willing to meet you if you like, and endeavor to reach some sort of understanding before she authorizes me to proceed with the case. If this is agreeable to you, I will make an appointment. I warn you, however, against making further promises which you do not intend to carry out, with the idea of averting immediate unpleasantness."

James Morton Despard, 2nd, caught at this ray of hope. At the worst, he believed, he could persuade her to let him down easily; at the best he might get her

to drop the action altogether. If he had any diplomacy in him, if he possessed an ounce of persuasion, he certainly meant to use it for all it was worth!

"Thank you. I'd like to see her," he said.

Mr. Shailer excused himself and left the room. When he returned, a few minutes later, he said: "Miss Oakley will meet you in the small writing room of the Hotel Kennebec at five o'clock."

Whereupon James Morton Despard, 2nd, took his departure.

X

WAITING in the Kennebec writing room, ten minutes before the appointed time, he took heart. There now was no necessity for employing the language and manners of a lout. Too, his attire was correct—very correct. And it was not impossible that Mary would find herself a bit awed by this sophisticated and worldly-wise young man, so different from the awkward fellow she had known in the country.

At the same time, he worried a little on another score. Somebody had put her up to this thing! Suddenly he thought of Mrs. Hemmingway. By Jove! It had been she, without a doubt! Maybe Mary would not dare agree to anything without consulting that lady. If so—ugh! He could remember that hard, flintlike jaw and those cold eyes. Not so good! Perhaps she would be with Mary. Again, not so good!

It was at this point that Mary came in—and alone!

A second later it seemed to Mr. Despard that every vital organ of his body—including heart, lungs and brain—had ceased to function. His mouth opened, and remained in that condition!

Mary Oakley stood before him, more bewilderingly graceful and beautiful than ever. But it was not the Mary Oakley he had known and made love to! She spoke, smiling wickedly, the while:

"Aren't you glad to see your little playmate again, *Pete*?"

The heart of James Morton Despard, 2nd, turned a somersault; his ears filled with a roaring sound, and his voice sounded like a croak as he managed: "What kind of a game is this, anyhow?"

This creature—exquisite, immaculately turned out in the height of New York fashion, poised, with a perfect enunciation and a voice like bells! Was he dreaming?

The thing was ridiculous! He shook himself and stared again.

"What seems to be the trouble, Mr. Despard?" inquired the girl, sweetly, as she sank into a chair.

"Tell me this," he demanded; "are you Mary Oakley, or not?"

"I was Mary Oakley for a few minutes at a time, and for my own purposes. I picked the name of the village dullard for much the same reason you called yourself Pete Marsh, I suppose."

James Morton Despard, 2nd, groaned. "But what were you doing up there. Good Lord! Who are you anyway?"

"To put you out of suspense—my name is Olive Dennison, and my brother is the partner of Myron Shailer, who so kindly helped me make a monkey out of you! Good old Myron!"

"H'm!" murmured the late Lothario, because he could think of nothing else at the moment. The "awe" business was shot cold. He could as well have awed the Queen of Sheba.

She went on: "To answer your other question, I was visiting my friends, the Kingsleys. They're well acquainted with your people, too, only you've been too busy rah-rah-ing and breaking hearts to keep up with the affairs of the saner members of your family."

"Ah!" he half protested.

"Did you think for a minute, in a tiny place like that, it wasn't known that James Morton Despard, 2nd, Esquire, was visiting his relatives? Why, I myself saw you driving home with your uncle the day you arrived. And if I chose to stay on the farm while my friends went on their Thousand Islands jaunt, it was no reason why a smart aleck should come around and try to pick on me, was it?"

"But why did you pretend you were a dumb-bell and—"

"Listen!" she cried. "Listen to the poor little innocent who came around 'goshing' and 'calc'latin,' and broadcasting a countryperson that no one but a ham actor would recognize—all to deceive a trusting maiden. Well, I thought if you were going to be funny, I could be as funny as you! Have I?"

"You have," James Morton Despard, 2nd, admitted. He considered a moment, then added: "Much funnier!"

"Then you'll call it quits—and you can do penance by getting me some tea?"

"Quits? Not yet!"
A strange look of elation leaped into his eye.

"No?"

"No, indeed!" He produced a letter from his pocket, and flaunted it before her eyes. "I've got it in black and white, duly signed by your authorized attorney! See! —my client is ready to carry out her

part of the agreement—!' Ha!" He bent swiftly toward her.

Quick as he was, she was quicker, so that before he realized it she was standing quite conventionally in the doorway, waiting to be taken to the tea room. But the look she flashed at him over her shoulder carried a challenge that was not lost on the erudite James Morton Despard, 2nd.

THE FIRE-GAZER

THE work is finished for the night.

The children are in bed,
And still she sits beside the fire
With drooping, weary head.
The flaming embers of the log
Might symbolize her race—
A tiller of the stubborn soil
With mobile, patient face.

Her mother sat before the fire
Besogged with tiredness dull,
And wondered at the why of life—
Bewildered in a lull.
Her mother's mother and her own,
And back to history's birth,
Have sat before their evening fires—
The daughters of the earth.

As magnetized with heat and light,
It draws them to its breast,
And hushing in a crimson voice,
It soothes fatigue to rest.
From rustling forests, mountain-high,
From florid delta plain,
It brings eternally a glimpse
Of beauty freed again!

What mysteries exist between
The woman and the fire—
But only silence sings their tale
Upon its muted lyre!
The howling winds from off the hills
Calls up a shower of sparks,
And somewhere down the snowy gulch
A lonely sheep-dog barks!

The call of love and motherhood;
The beckon of the grave
The gazers by the fire have felt
And answered, strong and brave!
But still they come, and still they go,
And here she sits alone,
The priestess of an ancient cult,
Unheard of and unknown!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

The Prince Presumptive

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—A MERCILESS BATTLE IS WAGED
OVER THE TEACUPS OF HIGH SOCIETY, AND
ASTOUNDING CASUALTIES OCCUR IN
UNEXPECTED QUARTERS

By Joseph Ivers Lawrence

Author of "Unbeatable Bates," "Money in Bundles," etc.

IT was the habit of Jonas Strong to post himself in front of the red-tiled stucco station at Beacon Bay twice daily and review somewhat austere the passengers that alighted from the parlor car of the regular three-car train. The passenger coaches rarely gave up visitors for that station, for no one below the grade of Pullman passengers was likely to have business at Beacon Bay, and the more humble servitors of the summer residents arrived early in the season and had little more to do with trains until the general fall exodus.

Nearly all persons that descended from those trains greeted the alert observer cordially, either as "Jonas," or as "Mr. Strong," and his responsive bows and murmurs were meticulously graduated according to the relative importance and social status of the persons. The James Sylvesters were entitled to an obeisance that brought the head nearly to the waistline, with an expansive gesture of both arms; but Jerry Maddox, who was a city politician, summering at Beacon Bay through some inexplicable indulgence, received a decent but barely perceptible nod, with a "how-de-do" which issued from pursed lips.

There were casual guests coming and going throughout the summer, and they were readily appraised by their apparel and bearing. Then there were occasional ill-advised commercial men whom Jonas curtly disposed of between trains; but the adventuring stranger, the explorer without credentials, was a specimen so unfamiliar to him that he was visibly perturbed when a vividly attractive young person got off the train on a morning early in June, and

stood gazing about the orderly desolation of the place with a disturbing air of being lost.

"So *this* is Beacon Bay!" she exclaimed softly, as the train went puffing on its way, and her tone and manner saved the speech from a suspicion of any intentional relationship to the familiar, trite catch line about a great European metropolis.

"Sorry we haven't any taxi here, ma'am," said Jonas Strong, actually flustered for the first time within his own memory. "All the folks have their own cars. Where—er—what house you going to?"

"I heard that there wasn't any hotel," said the mysterious visitor, "but—where's the town?"

"There isn't any!" said Jonas, with the finality of the Mad Hatter. "There's a passel o' houses a little bit up the street, and there's the post office and store; but all there is to Beacon Bay you can see for yourself right around the shore line there. That place over yonder is the yacht club, and out there along by the lighthouse is the Dunes Club, where the folks play golf. I—I reckon you come to visit somebody."

"Oh, no," said the girl frankly, little knowing how much her immediate status depended upon the answer. "No, I ran out from the city just to look around. I don't know the place at all, as you can see; but I've heard a lot about it, and I might rent a house for the summer, if there are any vacant ones."

Mr. Strong's perplexity gathered his brows into a sunburst of fine lines. The girl could hardly be twenty-five, and she was unaccompanied by maid, companion, or other recognized guarantee of eligibility;

but she had the calm, unruffled assurance of hereditary superiority. She was dressed with severe simplicity in blue linen, with tan sport shoes and a mannish straw hat, but the critic was sufficiently experienced to know that frills and furbelows most often indicated the kitchen wench in these topsy-turvy times.

"Well, now, Miss—er—or is it—?"

"My name is Miss Smith," said the girl practically.

The information was disappointing. Smiths and Joneses and Robinsons had arrived at Beacon Bay time and again in steam yachts and in motor cars with French and Italian labels, but this girl, with such a face, such eyes, such voice and manner, should have been Miss Van Something-or-other, at least.

"I was a goin' to say," Jonas went on, "that we don't often have such things as vacant houses in Beacon Bay. Folks like ours don't go moving around, I reckon you know. The only house here that ain't occupied is one belonging to Mr. James Sylvester; it's that one this side o' the yacht club, on the main road. See it—right over yonder? That was the Sylvesters' place before they built the big place up above—what they call 'The Turrets.'"

"That's a very attractive house!" exclaimed the girl, gazing across the railroad tracks, the State road, and the greensward that lay between her and a rather formidable frame structure that stood close to the sea beach. "Perhaps I could look at it? Do you have a real estate agent here, or must I see Mr. Sylvester himself?"

"I'm the real estate agent—all there is," said Jonas, much as the executioner of the Tower of London might have admitted his identity. It seemed to him a little incongruous that Beacon Bay should have anything as mediocre as real estate or real estate agents.

"I suppose you could see the house, ma'am," he went on rather fearfully, "but I'd have to see Mr. Sylvester about it first—or Mrs. Sylvester. Fact is, she'd be the one to see anyhow."

"Then let's go and see Mrs. Sylvester, if you don't mind," proposed the stranger. Mr. Strong paled a little.

"I don't know how that could be arranged; we'd have to see about it. First off, I'd have to see her secretary or write 'im a letter."

"So much formality will take a lot of

time," protested the girl; "I'll have to come all the way out here again."

"Yes, and you'll have to get the 2 P.M. train here this afternoon," said Jonas; "that's the last one for the city, ma'am, and we haven't got any hotel."

"I won't forget," she promised. "You needn't be afraid that I'll camp here at the station overnight. But if I missed the train, perhaps I could hire a motor car to take me to town. And then, perhaps Mrs. Sylvester might be good enough to invite me to stop overnight at her house, if we were to talk business."

"You don't know her!" said Jonas, in an awesome whisper. "She'd have to have letters of introduction, and she'd have to see your pedigree 'way back about ten generations, before she could invite you to her house."

"Perhaps my pedigree might keep me from accepting her hospitality."

Jonas started nervously and stared at her. He had read a good deal about Russian princesses and all manner of fallen majesty going about incognito, and he was an efficient, practical snob by training. Had he been a European villager instead of a Yankee, he would have known the *Almanach de Gotha* by heart.

"If you don't mind waiting here, ma'am," he proposed deferentially, "I'll go get my car and take you over to the office. I've only got a little car to run errands with. I'll be back here in five minutes."

"Oh, I'll walk to your office," she said, with a graciousness which left him wondering whether it was inspired by plebeian democracy or the inexplicable simplicity that is sometimes found in the truly great.

He insisted that the distance would be too much for her, but her determination was of such a quality that they walked, and presently she beheld Beacon Bay's one public building, a three-story affair of wood, with a rather commodious general store filling the lowest tier. A large sign read:

JONAS H. STRONG

Meat and Groceries, House Furnishings, Dry Goods
and Clothing, Hay and Grain

—and a smaller sign above a side entrance announced:

JONAS H. STRONG

Undertaking Parlors

"You have a rather large establishment, Mr. Strong," said the girl. "Why does

that little window up at the top have iron bars across it?"

"That's the jail," he explained, a little apologetically. "We don't have no regular citizens to lock up, but sometimes some of these foreign servants that they bring out here get to drinking lemon extract or furniture polish, and I have to take charge of them. I happen to be the constable and justice of the peace."

"How versatile you are!" she cried admiringly, "and how hard you must work! And you find time, with it all, to walk down and meet the trains."

"I have to," said Jonas, with a sigh of resignation. "I'm the station agent and the express agent, and I'm the postmaster, too."

"And the mate o' the Nancy brig," she chanted impulsively, in a breathless whisper that ended with a gurgle.

"How's that, ma'am?" he challenged suspiciously.

"I beg your pardon," she said contritely; "I was trying to think of some verses about a man that—that did so many important things, you know."

"May not be so terrible important," he protested, flushing self-consciously, "but they have to be done."

An automobile horn of basso-profundo register warned them out of the road, and a prodigious gray car with silver fittings rolled up to the store on wheels as big as millstones. A footman in gray whipcord darted into the store, evidently to get the mail for his master, and Jonas Strong uncovered and stood at attention as the master himself was discovered reclining on the cushions of the rear seat.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Sylvester," Jonas murmured hoarsely. "I don't want to disturb you, sir, but this lady—Miss Smith, I b'lieve—she says she wants to look at your house down by the beach, sir. I was going to—to get in touch with Mrs. Sylvester's secretary, but seein' that you're here, I—that is—"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Sylvester, helping Jonas out of his incoherent bewilderment for the moment, and slowly emerged from the depths of the cushions, actually stepped down from the door that the chauffeur scrambled to open, and planted his varnished boots in the common dust as he doffed his hat to the vision that glorified the village street.

"Miss Smith!" he murmured in a tone

that completely indorsed all Jonas Strong's suspicions of royalty in disguise.

"How do you do, Mr. Sylvester?" said Miss Smith primly, and Jonas noted with wonderment that she was unflustered. "Of course. I don't know anything about your house," she added easily, "but I should like very much to look at it and find out about terms and that sort of thing."

And now Jonas waited for Mr. Sylvester to inquire who Miss Smith might be, whence she came, whither going, and all manner of things of vital import; but the vagaries of the mighty are beyond comprehension, and Jonas was little more than disappointed when the millionaire handed Miss Smith into the car with a form of polite phrases. And his disappointment was swallowed up in victory at the next moment, for he, too, was invited into the gray chariot, to sit in awe beside the sphinx-like chauffeur while the footman remained behind.

The great car, riding as upon floating clouds, spurned the inequalities, even the loose cobblestones, of the ancient street, and glided to rest again in front of the vacant house before Jonas had well collected his rioting fancies. Then Mr. Sylvester betrayed his human weakness by confessing that he had not thought of such things as keys, and the chauffeur had to be dispatched to the home on the hill to get them.

While they waited, the three sat down on the steps of the house, just as any common folk might sit on steps, and Mr. Sylvester cast furtive, respectful glances at Miss Smith, and seemed to purr softly.

He was a man, the girl noted, of some forty years; well nurtured, dressed with elegant carelessness, and of simple and gentle bearing. The smooth skin of his rather broad, bland face seemed to have been steamed and bleached and massaged until there was no blood left in it, and his eyes were pale, a little tired, and a little uncertain of purpose as they roved about the scene.

"Mrs. Sylvester will be delighted to meet you, Miss Smith," he said presently, and his eyes cried out that he was lying. "We enjoyed five or six summers in this house, I believe; or was it seven, Jonas?"

"Four and a half, to be exact, sir," said Jonas, flushing with the importance of the man with the card-index mind. "You and

Mrs. Sylvester arrived here first in the month of July, and then two summers later the house was closed all the season, when you were in Europe."

"Ah, yes; well, it doesn't matter," said the gentleman wearily. "It's a very fair house, Miss Smith; I'll show it to you presently. The rooms are large and not bad for general entertaining. Seven master's rooms above, and the usual servants' quarters and offices, you know. I dare say your family will—"

"I haven't any," Miss Smith informed him simply.

"You haven't—any—family?" gasped the gentleman.

"No very close relations living, I'm sorry to say," she went on, unabashed. "You see, I'm a—I suppose I may call myself a business woman. I want to get a house that I can use for a tea room."

"My Go—I mean—oh, a tea room!" cried the man, taken off his guard, and flashing in one awful moment from stark horror to painful suppression of his perturbed emotions.

"It may be a rash venture," she explained blithely, "but one must make experiments, you know. I've heard so much about Beacon Bay—how the summer tourists motor through here by thousands and can't find a sandwich or a cup of tea. I understand, of course, that the people of the summer colony don't want the place to become popular in the ordinary sense, but it's not an unworthy object—is it?—to try to provide comfort and refreshment for travelers in distress."

Mr. Sylvester was obviously suffering. Blood rushed into his face and drained out again, and the muscles of his face and neck worked spasmodically. He was trying to say something, and he looked frantically at Miss Smith, and saw her large blue eyes alight with the ardor of ambition, while burnished copper ringlets, straying from beneath the smart little hat, caught the sun's rays and framed her adorably flushed face in an aureole of glory.

"You—er—*some* women are always trying to help somebody in distress!" he blurted, and his face became almost purple for the instant.

"I'm even trying to help myself, you see!" laughed the girl.

"Dear me, I trust you are not in distress!" exclaimed the bewildered gentleman. "You're joking, of course."

"It's distressing to have to earn one's own living," she explained, "when there are so many other things one would like to do."

"In these peculiar times," he said uncomfortably, "people are doing all sorts of strange things: I have a feeling—you'll pardon me, I hope!—that you are concealing—er—certain circumstances. It's rather the popular thing just now for great ladies to go into business; ladies of title abroad, and ladies of high social position."

"But I'm—just Miss Smith, you see."

"As long as one sees you, that's quite enough!" blurted the gentleman, and blushed furiously.

Then the chauffeur came back with the keys.

"Did you explain what I wanted them for?" his master inquired a little fearfully.

"No, sir; I didn't see anybody but the butler, sir, and he asked no questions."

Mr. Sylvester opened the principal entrance to the house, and they went in.

"It's completely furnished, isn't it?" cried the girl enthusiastically.

"After a fashion," the owner replied deprecatingly.

"But when that fashion happens to be Jacobean—and all oak and walnut, it's rather more than one could hope for," she insisted.

"Mrs. Sylvester furnished the new house quite differently," he said, "so we left everything here for the possible purchaser or the lessee."

"Some of the finer pieces would have to be put away," Miss Smith observed practically, "but even then, what a sumptuous tea room it would make!"

He winced, and his pallor returned, but he conducted her through the rooms, followed by the awed Jonas Strong.

"Of course it's all infinitely grander than I ever expected to find," she said, as they completed the tour, "and I'm afraid that the rental may be infinitely more than I ever expected to pay."

The man stole another appreciative glance at her rosily flushed face and her eager blue eyes, and the fear that she might not take the place; that she might go away and never appear again smote him and rendered him desperate.

"Mrs. Sylvester thought we should ask about two thousand for the season as it stands," he said; "but—but for a tea room—Oh, I should fancy that the figure ought to be—well—cut in half at least."

"How wonderful! How kind!" she cried. "But would Mrs. Sylvester agree, do you think?"

Another sharp spasm of pain flashed over the pale countenance, and it was evident that the thought of Mrs. Sylvester agreeing to anything agreeable was reminiscent of unhappy things.

"I should have to explain to her, of course," he said simply, but with the awe that accompanies vague thoughts of an ordeal deferred. "Would a thousand dollars for the season be too much? Do you really think you would care to take the house?"

"It's a great—a rash venture," she answered excitedly, "but I couldn't bear the thought of not taking it. It would simply make or break me, but that policy is not unusual in business nowadays. It might be really good business, I think, for me to close the deal without stopping to consider it too much; and—and I'm tempted to ask you to lease me the house for two seasons at least. I should so bitterly hate to have it sold, or something like that, after one successful season, you know; and I'm really perfectly sure of success in such a house."

"Yes, a two-year lease would secure it for you until you decided, perhaps, to buy it," he said nervously, but hopefully.

"And must you confer with Mrs. Sylvester first?" she inquired anxiously.

Again the spasm; but again a glance at the eager blue eyes gave him a false courage that was intoxicating.

"If you wish to complete the transaction before returning to town, I think I will—er—act on my own judgment," he said courageously; but his voice quavered pathetically.

"How splendid!" she cried. "It may seem hardly fair, but I'm so fearfully sure that Mrs. Sylvester might not approve, that I'd like to have the lease drawn up and signed before I go. Could we find somebody to fix it—a lawyer, or—"

"I am a lawyer, and a notary public," announced Jonas Strong, once more asserting his authority and majesty, but with the tragic air of a high personage about to compound a felony. "If you wish it, I will draw up the lease at my office at once. What name shall I use in the instrument, Miss Smith?"

"Miss Daisy Smith, of course," she answered naïvely.

"Daisy? Margaret, perhaps?" suggested Sylvester patiently and paternally.

"No, just Daisy!" she insisted, and the man looked at her again, and was utterly lost.

II

EVEN the brief postponement of impending confusion and disaster brings relief and a false sense of security to the timorous person, and it was in a way one of the deliriously happy moments of Mr. James Sylvester's life when he went home from Jonas Strong's office, and discovered that the impulsive and strenuous Mrs. Sylvester had departed with their daughter Marian by motor to visit friends in Tuxedo.

There was a viscount or a baronet, or something equally ornamental, involved, and she had caused the necessary preparations to be made in furious haste, and merely left word for the head of the family that he might follow on if he were so disposed.

James was not so disposed, however, for he feared that he might be forced into some admission of the transaction with Miss Daisy Smith. His wife's visit was probably good for a week, and Miss Smith had declared that she would take possession of the house immediately.

When she was actually in it, there would be at least some conventional difficulty in dislodging her and canceling the lease; and as for what Mrs. Sylvester would say and do when the dreaded moment came, that was on the laps of the gods, and the cataclysm was deferred for a few days at any rate.

He whistled blithely as he walked comfortably about the house, and to convince himself further that he was in a positively joyous mood, he ordered the car, and went to the Dunes Club for a round of golf.

Melville Oaks, a New York banker, who owned a "cottage" of marble and granite that resembled Warwick Castle, joined him at the first tee.

"Hello, Sylvester!" he cried with unusual cordiality. "Who's the ravishing beauty at your house? Staying long? Saw you posting about with her this morning."

Sylvester affected a cold reserve.

"This morning?" he queried, foolishly. "Ah, yes, I dare say you mean Miss Smith; I was showing her our old house. She's taking it. She's not stopping with us; I never met her before."

"Why, that girl I saw was a mere child!" exclaimed Oaks. "Mean to say she's taking your house herself, to live in? Well,

well! My wife wants to close up and go abroad next month, but—I've always preferred summering here at the Bay; I don't think we'll go."

"I don't think that Miss Smith intends to join in the social life to any extent," Sylvester said, coldly. "It's no secret, I believe, that she is going to use our old house for a—a sort of—that is, one of these fashionable tea rooms, you know. Nothing extraordinary about that, you know! Quite the popular and correct thing just now; lots of our best people are doing it. Something of a fad, as it were."

"Lots of our impecunious best people are doing it," remarked Melville Oaks, skeptically. "Perhaps one might say, our temporarily embarrassed next-best people, eh? Oh, well, I'm delighted, Sylvester; it's quite exciting. I'm fond of tea—if flasks are allowed. I hope the beautiful hostess doesn't intend to make it too strictly a hen-party. Matter of fact, I doubt she'd get away with it: our women here could never forgive her for carrying around a face and figure like hers."

"I don't think she has the idea that a small colony like this could support a tea room all by itself," said Sylvester. "She spoke of the heavy motor traffic here in summer."

Oaks made a wry face.

"Ugh! Motorists! Tourists!" he grumbled. "Introducing a pest, eh? Odors of gasoline and the perspiring lower middle class. Wailing infants, yelping lap dogs, orange and banana peels, ice cream cones, and soda pop. Lay you twenty to one that your blue-eyed strawberry blonde is sent here by a road house syndicate. Refined cabaret, black-face jazz, and all that."

"I say, Oaks!" protested Sylvester, with characteristically mild indignation, "you're spreading it on a little thick, aren't you? I don't know that I'm generally regarded in this neighborhood as utterly brainless or utterly vulgar. You're insinuating—yes—confound you!—you're practically stating that I've leased my own property for a public nuisance. By Jove! I think I'm entitled to an apology!"

"I grovel at your feet, old man!" cried Oaks a little facetiously. "Please consider the apology duly rendered. I was merely spoofing, of course. It's perfectly clear that the sea nymph I saw with you is going to turn your house into a rendezvous de luxe for elderly spinsters."

"It's not clear at all!" said the other crossly. "What I want you to understand is, that this Miss Smith is an exceptional person, a very superior person in every way."

"I'll say she is!" agreed Oaks, to the further annoyance of his victim.

"There are dozens—scores of society women, right out of the first ranks of Mrs. Astor's original 'Four Hundred,'" argued Sylvester, "now engaged in running tea rooms, millinery shops, all manner of business places, right around Fifth Avenue, and it's considered highly creditable."

"Yes, yes, one can open a society butcher shop nowadays, and be highly commended for it, *provided* that one's family of two or three generations back were not butchers."

"Yes, I dare say," agreed Sylvester a bit doubtfully. "But I want you to know that Miss Smith is—oh, quite one of our own kind."

"Friend of Mrs. Sylvester's, I suppose?"

The other flushed and visibly winced.

"No, she's not," he admitted gravely.

"Mrs. Sylvester is away at present on a visit. I have an idea that Miss Smith is from the West—or the South; probably the South. Wherever she comes from, I can assure you that she is highly connected. We shall know her better presently."

"It will not be my fault if I do not," Oaks asserted. "And—I say, Sylvester, you can't deny that I have a way with 'em! I'm not exactly young or particularly handsome, I know, but I seem to get along. All right, run along after your ball, and I'll follow on."

Sylvester ambled away from the tee toward his caddy, who had honorably retrieved his ball from a spruce thicket fifty yards off.

"He's an ass!" he mumbled petulantly. "A silly ass; no, he's a cad—a conceited, impossible, objectionable cad. I'll tell him so yet!"

Next morning he gave orders—with the pleasant assurance that there was no one at hand to countermand them—to have the old house cleaned and put in order for the new tenant, and he bustled about strenuously and supervised the operations. Windows were polished, floors waxed, lawns and hedges trimmed; and he had a last year's electric launch brought over from his boathouse on the assumption that it really ought to go with the old house. Mrs.

Sylvester would not overlook that extra touch, he reflected rather miserably, but aggravations would scarcely count; her rages never varied in degree, and he was in for the full load, irrespective of details.

Daisy Smith came again to Beacon Bay the following morning, with three maids and a cook, and a truck lumbered out from the city with several trunks, a dozen light mahogany tea tables, some crates of chairs, and a lot of sundries.

"Don't take you long to get things together, does it?" said Jonas Strong, who escorted the lessee to the house and delivered the keys to her.

"I may have hurried things too much," she admitted, "but the season is so frightfully short, and every single day means so much money. A whole week might mean failure. I've got a Swiss woman for a cook, at an awful salary, and my three maids are guaranteed fit to be ladies in waiting to a queen."

Jonas did not seize the chance for a compliment, but he conceded that her business principles were sound. To strike while the iron was hot, he said, had always been his unvarying rule, and it had made him what he was.

"And you are so—so many things, Mr. Strong!" exclaimed Miss Smith admiringly.

"I'm one of the selectmen of Beacon Bay, too," Jonas announced a bit shyly. "I'm game warden, too, an' chief of the volunteer fire company."

Daisy opened her blue eyes wide with amazement.

"You are so versatile!" she cried. "And you must be very efficient in all your offices, or the people wouldn't heap so much responsibility on your shoulders."

"It's a pretty small place," he said modestly. "I ain't claiming much credit for holding so many jobs. Somebody—any place—has to do all the work and take all the responsibility."

"Leaders always arise," the girl observed sagely. "The people have to be led, and they have to have representatives. Beacon Bay is lucky that it has so efficient and conscientious a man to depend on."

"You seen a good deal of the world, I reckon," Jonas remarked solemnly. "Been to college, too, I s'pose. Ain't many young ladies with such heads on 'em."

Daisy thanked him, and was gratified that she had secured so important a partisan and ally as the veritable Pooh-Bah of

Beacon Bay. He became indispensable at once with his advice and practical aid, and when she prepared to advertise the tea room with a signboard suspended over the garden gate, she got him to admit only grudgingly that there was novelty in the severe simplicity of "Miss Smith's Tea Room." He held out manfully for "The Neptune Refreshment Parlors," and was frankly skeptical of her final judgment.

As she hastily organized her establishment and assembled her forces, he caused every locally available thing that she needed to appear as if by magic, and when she mentioned a chore man to look after the garden and help motoring customers with their cars, he produced even such an apparent rarity within the hour.

"It's marvelous, Mr. Strong," she exclaimed gratefully, "for you to find such a man so quickly. I supposed all the working people were employed at the big estates already."

"This young feller just happened along," he explained. "I have a notion that some feller most always does happen along when there's a real need for 'im. Sometimes we need things, an' wonder why we can't get 'em, and I reckon it generally turns out that we didn't really need 'em. I was a frettin' a good deal, how you was to find a handy man when they're so scarce, an' along comes this young feller, lookin' for just that kind of a job."

"Then, of course, he doesn't come—that is—well recommended?" Daisy queried a little doubtfully; but she tried to hide her natural misgivings.

Jonas snapped his fingers with an upward gesture.

"That for all the recommends!" he cried, with something of impatience. "I seen, in my time, a whole lot of these highly recommended folks, and there's plenty of 'em I wouldn't trust with my dinner—if it was a good one. These recommends written out on a piece o' paper don't cost much to write, an' paper's cheap. I want to look a feller in the face, an' in the eye; that's where his recommends are written. Same way with a hoss; I could always tell a mean hoss soon as I looked at his ears an' his eyes."

"This young man looks honest, I'm sure," Daisy admitted politely. "If anything, he seems a little too much of a gentleman to be doing—just this sort of work. He speaks like an educated person, too."

"Nothing to his discredit!" protested Jonas. "I like to see a nice, polite feller, with a good schooling, that ain't afraid to work for a living. Richard Wyndham, his name is; an' that's a good, respectable name, without nothin' highfalutin' about it."

Next morning the tea room was open for business, with prim little maids hovering over the inviting tables, and toward noon Mrs. Anne Sylvester returned to Beacon Bay.

Fate was still kind to James Sylvester—if there is kindness in deferring an ordeal—for he did not have to break the news to his lady. She passed the old house on her way through the town, but her car was halted before it had gone far beyond the swinging signboard that caught her roving eye.

"Stop!" she cried to her chauffeur. "What is that thing, Stevens? What does it mean?"

The man had no knowledge of the offending symbol, but he affected a stark horror in keeping with the occasion.

Anne Sylvester descended from the car and swept majestically through the garden to the door of the house, where she was greeted by one of the white-capped maids.

"Where's the person that's responsible for this outrage?" she demanded hoarsely, disdaining the invitation to enter.

"Miss Smith is just inside," said the maid.

"Send her out!"

Miss Smith came out and smiled engagingly at the formidable person before whom a certain small segment of the vast social circle habitually trembled.

"Who are you?" demanded the investigator, and her hostility seemed to be aggravated by the blue eyes and rose-tinted cheeks.

"I'm Miss Smith," said Daisy.

The fine dark eyes of the pale and severely elegant society matron flashed in their depths like black opals.

"You look brazen enough for anything!" she declared hotly. "Close those doors and lock them instantly, do you hear? Then take down that hideous sign. I want it removed before I leave here. You needn't say anything; I don't talk with persons like you; I only give them orders."

"But if you don't mind," said Daisy sweetly, "I would like to ask if this is Mrs. Sylvester. You see I haven't had the pleasure of meeting many people yet; I've only

met Mr. Sylvester, and he was so charming and kind."

"Oh, he was!" gasped the lady, and the first faint flush stained the marble cheek.

"I'm sure you don't understand," Daisy went on pleasantly, "that Mr. Sylvester rented this house to me for a tea room."

"You mean that you bamboozled him into letting you have it!" the other corrected sharply. "He is a—he is too easily imposed upon by designing persons. I want you to get out immediately—instantly!—and have all your miserable paraphernalia out before to-night. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly!" Daisy answered mildly. "But you have made one mistake: I'm really not the sort of person that takes orders from you. There might be some question of formal social standing, but I think I'm quite your superior in the matter of good breeding."

Mrs. Sylvester was silent for a moment. A mighty struggle was going on within her, a combat between sheer temperament and certain aristocratic traditions. The proud family name evidently turned the tide, however, for she turned and walked down the steps, then halted and faced about.

"It's not right that I should be subjected to such indignities," she said, "but I shall get my attorney at once; he will act for me."

III

At the Dunes Club, while Mrs. Sylvester was delivering her ultimatum to Miss Smith at the tea room, some golfers were gathered about James Sylvester to torment him with smiling questions about his new tenant. Melville Oaks had lost no time in spreading a report of the sensational beauty and grace of the new arrival, and Sylvester was beginning to wish that he had been less impulsive in welcoming her to the community.

"Tell you what!" exclaimed Jerry Maddox, the lawyer and politician, "we'd better call it a day here on the links, and go over and see this ragin' beauty for ourselves. I can always swallow a cup o' tea for a worthy purpose, and—well, we surely ought to be nice and neighborly to a new-comer. It's not so hard when they're easy to look at."

"We'd better be about it, instead of standing here gassing," said Rex Raleigh. "The baron lit out as soon as he heard Oaks say there was a new dizzy blonde in

town. He's a fast worker; probably proposed to her by this time."

"But really, you know, you'll scare the poor girl," James Sylvester protested weakly.

"Come along, then, and protect her, gran'pop," jeered Maddox, with his peculiar twisted grin.

The four men piled into Raleigh's car and drove to the new tea room, and they found the baron already seated at one of the little tables with tea, muffins, and marmalade before him.

His noble title was used in a disrespectfully facetious sense around Beacon Bay, but it was a real title; he was a diplomat sent by one of the small new nations of Europe to Washington. He habitually lived up to the romantic name of Rudolph Osbert with dashing grace and gallantry, and he had added no little zest to the social life of the summer colony by taking one of the smaller cottages on the bluffs for his summer residence.

As the four grinning men entered the room—for even Sylvester grinned in order to appear sociable—the baron arose with punctilious formality and bowed from the waist until he formed a perfect right angle.

"Si' down, baron; don't let your ice water get cold on our account," muttered Jerry Maddox.

"But ice water ees not hot!" cried the mystified Rudolph. "Ah, now I see! Eet is the joke. Ha, ha!"

"Oh! Ah! *Ravissante!*" he cried suddenly, turning away from the group.

"Hey? What? What's the matter now?" inquired Maddox, then: "Oh, yes, sure enough! I'll say she is!"

Miss Daisy Smith had entered the room, and was glancing critically at the tables and the waitresses.

"Very attractive place you've made of it, Miss Smith," said Sylvester, blushing furiously, then managed to introduce his three friends in awkward, halting phrases.

"May we not have the pleasure of Miss Smith's company for tea?" Oakes proposed suavely.

"Oh, you're very kind," she replied, "but—not this afternoon, thank you. I have so much to do, you see."

She fluttered airily away, having some special business with the waitresses, and the four men sat down.

"Not an unqualified veto!" Oakes exclaimed. "'Not this afternoon,' she said.

There'll be other afternoons, and I shan't always have you three bounders with me."

"The question is, why ain't she in the movies?" muttered Maddox. "Or why hasn't she got her fourth or fifth husband, and a steam yacht and a flock of motor cars?"

"Perhaps she occupies too humble a social position to be as depraved as the people that you know," suggested Raleigh.

"The folks that I know on the East Side are all decent and respectable," snarled Jerry Maddox; "the only society people that I know anything about are you folks here at the Bay. You can judge what my impressions have been."

Rex Raleigh, the youngest man in the party, caught Miss Smith's eye where she stood at the far end of the long room, and smiled expansively in his most winning manner; but she smiled and nodded perfunctorily in return, then turned about and became very busy.

"Can't you see she ain't that kind?" Maddox demanded. "Don't make a monkey of yourself."

"Make my compliments to Mees Smeeth," said Rudolph Osbert softly to one of the waitresses. "Say to her that the Baron Osbert would 'ave the honaire of speaking with her about this so adorable place."

The waitress departed on the mission, stifling a snicker, but smiling broadly. When she returned, however, she was properly grave and dignified.

"Miss Smith appreciates the gentleman's compliments," she reported, "an' she regrets that she hasn't the time to meet all her guests socially."

"*Stri-i-ke tuh!*" chortled Jerry Maddox, rising from his chair and assuming the pose of an umpire.

"I'd suggest," murmured Sylvester, "that we all try to conduct ourselves with at least the propriety that we would observe at home."

"That would mean a rough-house for some of us," said Maddox.

"Speak for yourself!" corrected Melville Oaks a little sharply. "Well, here comes Roddy Delarbe. Now we'll all be proper enough. Roddy wouldn't sit down here unless everything was absolutely conventional and correct."

A tall, thin, white-faced man of some thirty years, with languidly aristocratic manners, entered the room, nodded coldly

to the men at the table, and spoke curtly to one of the waitresses.

"Tell Miss Smith that Mr. Delarbe wishes to see her on business," he said.

"Lucky dog!" cried Maddox. "But just think o' Roddy wanting to see any one on business. He's getting to be a man."

Miss Smith came out directly and looked at the haughty visitor inquiringly.

"You have business with me?" she queried. "Will you step into the little room at the front? I haven't an office yet."

"It won't take me long to tell my business," he answered, and he drew nearer to her and lowered his voice. "I'm representing Mrs. Sylvester. What's your game here, Miss Smith? Mrs. Sylvester wants you to get out—immediately! If you've got a proper lease signed up, what will you take for it? Name your price."

"Before I talk business with you," Daisy said softly and calmly, "you will have to apologize for your impertinence. I am not playing a game, and I wish you might be fair enough to admit that I can open a tea room in Beacon Bay and still be as well born and well bred as the people that live so extravagantly in your summer colony."

Roderick Delarbe was dark complexioned, but he had pale eyes, and he peered at Daisy coldly and skeptically from beneath languidly drooping lids.

"Oh, very well," he said impatiently, "I'll beg your pardon if that will help any. Mrs. Sylvester feels that she's been duped. You've got the house all right, I guess, but she wants it back. If you're a business woman you must have a price. What 'll you take to clear out right away?"

"I should have to be paid for my trouble," said the girl thoughtfully. "Then I might not be able to make a fresh start in any other place this season. I don't think that I could give up the lease unless Mrs. Sylvester were willing to pay me ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand gingersnaps!" cried Delarbe explosively, raising his voice for all to hear. "What do you think you are, one o' these bobbed-hair bandits? You're crazy enough to be in a strait-jacket!"

There was a sudden clatter of chairs and shuffling feet, and the indignant man was surrounded by others quite as indignant.

"Can that line o' talk, Roddy, and make your best apology to the lady," snarled Jerry Maddox, "or I'll bust your face right through the back o' your head."

"You never betrayed yourself so thoroughly before, Delarbe," remarked Melville Oaks. "You're an ass!"

"I'm not much on talk with your kind," Rex Raleigh told him, "but I'd like to meet you outside for two minutes."

A long arm shot over the shoulder of Oaks, and a well manicured hand with open palm smote the cheek of Mr. Delarbe with a resounding crack.

"Permit me to offer you my card," said the Baron Rudolph Osbert, and flourished a bit of pasteboard toward the victim of his attack. "I am at your service."

"But, gentlemen," Daisy protested, as soon as she could make herself heard, "won't you please consider my position a little bit? I'm not seeking publicity of the sort that this might lead to, and you're all making a frightful disturbance. This Mr. Delarbe is rather young, and perhaps he never had proper home training, you know. I think he'll be willing to go out quietly, and he must understand that he's not to come in here again."

"I'm a member of the bar, and I have my professional duties to perform," Delarbe asserted grumpily, while his worried eyes shifted from one to another of the angry faces gathered about him.

"I think you've said enough—or quite too much—already, Roderick," observed the hitherto silent Mr. Sylvester. "You'd better go, now, and I don't want to hear of your coming back again."

"I say, Sylvester, you can't talk to me as if I were one of your lackeys!" protested the young man. "I've been retained by Mrs. Sylvester, and it's not for you to say what I shall do, you know."

"I think that's reasonable," agreed Daisy. "Perhaps this is his first case, and he's acting just as he thinks a lawyer ought to act. He may be very gentlemanly when he's not performing his official duties."

"But zis card!" fumed the baron, still brandishing the tiny white symbol of his gallantry. "I slap hees oogly face, an' I offer him my card; for that he must do sometheeng!"

"I'll have you arrested for assault and battery, if I do anything," grumbled Delarbe. "I'm not fighting duels with all the Balkan bandits that manage to but into polite society."

"Ah! You hear what he call me?" the baron gasped. "Balkan bandeet! It is too mooch. I demand satisfaction, gentle-

men. Perhaps, Meester Maddox, you will be so good—you will make ze arrangements as my friend, eh?"

"Sure, I'll be your friend. Si' down!" growled Jerry Maddox, and unceremoniously pushed the baron into his chair.

"Shall I throw 'em all out for you, Miss Smith?" inquired a good-looking young man in khaki working clothes, who had entered quietly during the excitement.

"Who is this fellow?" asked James Sylvester fretfully, eying the intruder, and seeming to feel outraged that he himself was tacitly included in the gruff proposal.

"I'm just Wyndham—the hired man," was the answer. "I was hired to *clean up* around here, and I can clean up 'most any sort of rubbish."

"Oh, really, you mustn't talk like that, Wyndham," objected Daisy. "I appreciate your—your zeal and loyalty, you know, but I'll call you when—when I want you, you know."

"All right, Miss Smith; I'll be ready, all right," the handy man assured her, and slowly withdrew, glowering upon the company ominously.

"Now is the time for disappearing, Roddy," suggested Rex Raleigh. "You're lucky to get off so easily—and you have to thank Miss Smith for being so gracious about it. In another minute that porter chap might have cleaned you up with his brush and dustpan."

"But we all ought to be very nice to young men that are just starting out in the world," said Daisy. "It's so creditable for them to have professions and to be willing to work."

"I suppose you think I don't know you're kidding me," said Delarbe.

"Oh, but I'm very serious about it," she insisted. "You were very impressive when you came in. I know perfectly well that there are times when lawyers have to be rude and brutal, and I'm sure that you'd be very conventional and polite if we were to meet socially."

"Business matters and social life are very different things," observed Delarbe sagely. "A lawyer isn't very professional who goes about treating legal matters as if he were at an afternoon tea. I wish all women could understand such things as well as you do."

"It would seem," Melville Oaks remarked dryly, "that we have become a bit superfluous and *de trop*, gentlemen."

"But it was very kind of all of you to rush to my defense so gallantly," Daisy assured them. "I'm merely trying to clear up all misunderstandings, and show you that Mr. Delarbe was acting from a sense of duty."

"That explains everything all round!" declared Rex Raleigh. "The baron was right, too, you see; he was acting from a sense of duty when he hit 'im."

"But yes," exclaimed the baron, rising again, "and I must inseeest—"

"Don't!" muttered Maddox, thrusting him back into the chair. "You'll get the static all stirred up again."

Some one entered the room hurriedly, and a serving maid was brushed aside as an obstructing piece of furniture. Mrs. Sylvester stood surveying the group like a sovereign catching her unwary court in the midst of unseemly revels.

"Ah!" she breathed, just audibly.

A faint, delicate flush relieved the natural pallor of James Sylvester's austere countenance.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he said with conciliating blandness.

"So you *are* here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, yes—h-m—I am—that is, we are all here," he agreed, as though to assure her that her senses were not at fault.

"The persons that I might have expected to find are here," she returned blighting-ly. "Tell me, Roderick, have these men been bullying you?"

"Bullying me?" queried Delarbe, a little nettled. "Hardly that, Mrs. Sylvester. I'm not a boy, you know."

"Miss Smith is vacating the premises immediately, I suppose?"

"I have to talk with Miss Smith privately, but—"

"There are no 'buts' about it, Roderick! I sent you here as my agent to get her out, and I want no shilly-shallying about it. She's not the sort of a person to—"

"My dear Anne, if you'll let me have a word," began Mr. Sylvester.

"Be still, James!" ordered his wife. "We'll have a word presently, you and I. Just now a little firmness and authority are needed here."

"But, really, Mrs. Sylvester," Delarbe protested courageously, "I think you're laboring under a misapprehension, you know; you've been misinformed, perhaps. Miss Smith is— Oh, not that sort of a

person! I've been talking with her, and she's—"

"All men are imbeciles, it seems!" cried Mrs. Sylvester. "I was fool enough to think that *you* had not arrived at the age of sheer idiocy. But you're all alike—just one look at a baby-doll face, and your wits are scattered. I'll take charge of things myself.

"Here, you girl!" she called to one of the staring maidservants. "Clear off these absurd tables at once. I'll pay you your day's wages myself. Get that other girl and prepare to pack up all this rubbish. I am the owner of this house, and you'll take orders from me."

"Please, ma'am, I'm working for Miss Smith; I take my orders from her," the girl replied spiritedly.

Mrs. Sylvester turned upon her hotly, and physical violence might have ensued, but a bulky male figure was suddenly interposed between the belligerents. A strange man had slipped quietly into the room, and he was conspicuously a specimen of the genus motor-tourist, all bedizened in dusty boots, dusty dust coat, dusty cap, and dusty goggles.

"Afternoon, madam," he said, by way of greeting to the enraged lady. "Servant problem's somethin' awful, ain't it? You have my sympathy. But how about four special orders of fried chicken, with waffles an' all the fixin's that the house affords? No special rush about it, but I reckon you can have the hors-d'oeuvres ready to start on by the time we get washed up a bit, eh?"

"This—*this* is too much!" wailed Mrs. Sylvester tragically.

"Keep your shirt on, madam!" counseled the masterful tourist with the authority of a free-born Yankee. "I can see you're a temperamental sister, but business is business. If you're operating under a common victualer's license you've got to serve the public, an' me an' my party are respectable, an' can pay for what we get. My name's William T. Judd; I'm from Turnerville, Ohio, an' I'm in the furniture business. My wife, an' her brother an' *his* wife, are outside in the car—an' we're all ready to eat, soon's the nose bags can be filled. Buck up, sister, an' give us a smile; we all have our off days."

The twisted smile of Jerry Maddox had grown into the fiendish grin of a satyr, but, with the other men, he was grimly silent.

For the young and irrepressible Rex Raleigh, however, the situation became overpowering: he gurgled suddenly, his breath escaped with a loud hissing sound as of harnessed steam, and he uttered one explosive "ha-ha" with unpardonable gusto.

"James Sylvester, can you stand there and see me insulted and humiliated like this?" cried the tortured lady.

"Now, look here!" said Mr. Sylvester rather too mildly, advancing a step.

"Hello, here's papa!" exclaimed Mr. Judd, of Ohio, now becoming irritated. "I reckon papa washes the dishes and acts as bouncer when things get rough. Back to the kitchen, old-timer! I can see she's got a man's-size wallop in that right arm like the muscles in her tongue, but—believe me!—I know something about women; I can handle 'em."

A woman appeared in the doorway, volumnously disguised in goggles, veils, and dust coat.

"Will-yum!" she called shrilly. "While you're standin' here gassin' with these country folks, we're starvin' an' famishin'. We been waitin' so long we've et up all the bananas an' chocolate."

"I ain't 'gassin' with these country folks!" protested William indignantly. "I'm tellin' 'em where they get off; and when they come to, I reckon we'll have somethin' to eat."

Miss Daisy Smith stepped forward quietly and addressed the man.

"Won't you please go and sit down at one of the tables?" she said. "The waitress will take your order. You've been too hasty, you see: this lady and these gentlemen are summer residents here in town, and they have nothing to do with this tea room."

While the traveler muttered expressions of amazement and apology, James Sylvester tried valiantly to conduct his wife ceremoniously toward the door, but she moved slowly, and distributed venomous remarks all about her.

"You may consider me entirely through with the case, Mrs. Sylvester," Roderick Delarbe said with youthful dignity. "I must say, in justice to myself, that you permitted me to think that Miss Smith was a—another sort of a person, and she's—"

"A blue-eyed china doll!" cried the angry matron. "And a designing minx! An adventuress! A swindler! A confidence woman!"

"Me an' my family are on the way south," said the traveler, addressing the departing lady, "but I'll come back here an' appear in court if the young lady wants to sue for libel."

Rex Raleigh, slowly following after the retreating Sylvesters—evidently unwilling to miss any subsequent scene of the comedy—paused for a word with the stranger.

"Do you know whom you have been insulting?" he inquired with keen relish. "Do you know whose goat you have been getting? That's Mrs. James Sylvester, general of a division in New York's 'four hundred'; and her husband is rated at about five million in Wall Street—he's the chap that you called a dish-washer."

"Glad you told me, young man," replied the tourist; "I can write it home to my friends. But I happen to be in Dunn's and Bradstreet's myself. You can ask any furniture man who William Judd, of Turner-ville, Ohio, is, and you'll find out something that won't hurt you. My kitchen cabinets are in houses from Bangor, Maine, to Wellington, New Zealand, and they're sold with an ironclad five-year guarantee. I guess my record will stand alongside anything that your friend Sylvester can show in Wall Street, and I'm boosting better homes for millions of one-hundred-per-cent Americans."

IV

DAISY SMITH speculated with lively interest upon what adventures the second day of her war with Beacon Bay society might bring, for her rather circumstantial victory of the first day had resulted merely in a tactical retreat of the enemy, and she was neither surprised nor much disturbed when a handsome motor car with liveried chauffeur and footman drew up at the garden gate about noon.

The two persons who alighted were strangers to her, however—a plump, somewhat overdressed, matronly woman, and a strongly contrasting young girl built distinctly on racing lines and showing the familiar symptoms and affectations of the flapper type.

"Miss Smith?" queried the matron in a soft, purring voice, when Daisy herself greeted them at the door. "Ah, I knew you from the descriptions that were given by the men. The women said you were brazen and theatrical, but, I do declare, you are rather sweet. I'm Mrs. Merriam,

and I've brought my daughter down here for luncheon. I told Mrs. Sylvester I'd look in and determine for myself whether you ought to be—er—obliterated from the scene, you know. But—dear me!—you're extremely decorative, at any rate."

"You're very kind, madam," said Daisy, overwhelmed.

"Why don't you bob your hair?" inquired the pale and heavily serious young woman with the bobbed black hair, as she appraised Miss Smith frankly.

"Why, really, it's not required as a social convention yet, is it?" laughed Daisy. "I've never been called to account for it, but—well, I suppose I'm pretty well satisfied with my hair as it is."

"Old-fashioned sweet-sixteen type!" Miss Merriam noted aloud. "I suppose you'll be one of those woman's-place-is-in-the-home persons. You don't use powder or rouge, either. Or perhaps you don't make up until afternoon?"

"I don't make up at any time," Daisy informed her pleasantly. "I've always thought one's natural color the best—if one has it, you know; and I've been uncommonly healthy all my life."

"Must be a frightful bore!" exclaimed Miss Merriam. "Being healthy means going without all sorts of things, doesn't it? I suppose you're a teetotaler on all the things that affect the complexion and the nerves."

"I never worry about my diet," said Daisy; "but I've never cared to eat and drink a lot of things just because it seemed fashionable to do so. It's awfully silly—don't you think?—for people to acquire tastes for all manner of nasty things, just because the least intelligent members of society have declared them to be smart."

"The least intelligent?" challenged the inquisitor.

"Oh, I'm just generalizing, of course," said Daisy, "but I mean the people that get to be such bores, and have such awful manners, just through trying to do the correct thing."

"H-m—you might be a socialist if you tried hard enough," the other observed hopefully. "I'm a radical myself—not a pink one, either; but I'm still—oh, I'm still at home, you know: traditions, family, duty, inhibitions! It's all too ghastly!"

"She's so unjust to herself, Miss Smith!" the mother protested plaintively. "Really, she's the *dearest*, *sweetest* thing that ever

lived, when she wants to be. But she *will* read these atrocious radical journals and newspapers. It's very trying at times! She calls our butler 'comrade,' and she's instructed her maid to address her as 'Merriam' because they are equals, and 'Miss Merriam' is too *bourgeois*. I can't understand such theories, and it's very confusing and trying."

"I'm emancipated, that's all," explained Miss Merriam; "or I shall be, as soon as I get to be self-supporting. I'm going in for interpretive dancing. It's art, and there's money in it."

"She's studying with Prince Solskevitch, in New York—twenty-five dollars a lesson!" said Mrs. Merriam, with a curious mixture of regret and pride.

"What's twenty-five dollars a lesson when it will mean independence for me?" demanded the girl. "And it's so—er—cultural and intellectual! I specialize in Greek stuff, you know, and some of the old Slavic things. I shall appear with symphony orchestras and that sort of thing."

"Of course, everything comes high nowadays," philosophized Mrs. Merriam wistfully. "Dancing lessons were about a dollar when I was a child; but everything has changed since then. Nowadays lamb chops are seventy cents a pound in this ridiculous little village."

"You mustn't let me delay your luncheon," said Daisy. "I do enjoy talking, but perhaps my cook can be preparing something for you. I'll take your order myself."

"Ah, yes, that will be lovely," agreed the lady. "You suggest something for us, my dear. Something very light; I'm on a very strict diet—reducing, you know. Let us have—perhaps a simple cream soup of some kind, *en tasse*, and a broiled chicken, and some potatoes *au gratin*. And do you have English muffins, or crumpets? Ah, yes; we'll have muffins toasted and buttered; and some asparagus tips with mayonnaise. Very little for sweets, please: some simple pastry; and we'll have chocolate instead of coffee—chocolate with whipped cream. I used to be positively thin, you know, and one can't afford to get too plump as one grows older; I'm literally starving myself."

"You may put that down as mother's order," said the tall and angular Miss Merriam. "I'll have some cucumber sandwiches and some tea with lemon. Solske-

vitch wants his pupils to be lithe and feline; I keep myself in training all the time."

"Won't you sit down at one of the tables?" asked Daisy. "There's one by the window overlooking the garden. I'm sorry I've kept you standing all this time."

"You're such a charming little hostess!" exclaimed Mrs. Merriam. "You inspire conversation, you see. You've made me forget what I came for. I was going to be very critical and severe, I assure you, but we've been chit-chatting like old friends, haven't we? I shall tell Anne Sylvester that she's utterly, horribly wrong. You're an acquisition, my dear; you have the charm of youth, beauty, and delightful conversation. I shall take you up."

"You're really very kind, Mrs. Merriam!" exclaimed Daisy, a little bewildered by so much effusiveness.

"Here comes another one of the committee," announced Miss Merriam, observing from the window a woman who descended from a scarcely elegant closed car of the smaller and distinctly democratic type. "Anne Sylvester is trying to stir up all the hen sentiment against you, Miss Smith. She knows she can't pull a vote from the men, but there are more women in the village than men, and they're pretty deadly, at that."

"It's dear old Kate Barton!" cried Mrs. Merriam enthusiastically. "Quite the social arbiter of Beacon Bay! She owns practically everything but the water around here, you know; and she's the only person who has no fear of Anne Sylvester."

A bright-eyed, thin, and angular woman, of an age somewhere between forty and sixty, fairly bounced into the room.

"Hello!" she cried, and smiled with something of the mischievous merriment of a good-humored witch.

"Mrs. Barton, I believe?" murmured Daisy, slightly astonished.

"Mrs. *nothing!*" chuckled the visitor. "Miss Barton, if you please. I've never seen a man in my generation good enough to make me change my name. So you're Miss Smith! I've been asked to look you over. You look all right; haven't had your hair cut, and don't use calimine; pretty well covered up with clothes, too. What did you do to Mrs. Sylvester to give her a nervous breakdown? She hasn't any son for you to vamp."

"Perhaps Mr. Sylvester—" began Mrs. Merriam helpfully.

"Rot!" cried Miss Barton. "Jimmy Sylvester never had nerve enough to flirt with a dressmaker's dummy. He may *admire*—poor old lamb!—but Anne never lets him off the leash."

"Won't you sit down, Miss Barton?" said Daisy, vastly embarrassed by the frankness of the new acquaintance.

"Yes, I'll have lunch with Mrs. Merriam," announced the spinster. "But she can't order for me. I'm dyspeptic. If your cook is not too highbrow, I'll take a piece of apple pie and a cup of coffee; two or three cups of coffee probably, before I'm through."

Daisy seized the opportunity to slip away to the kitchen, where she aided the efficient but temperamental Swiss woman in executing the three orders without undue delay.

"Such taste—these Americans!" expostulated the cook, with tragical shrugs and grimaces. "Always chicken, lobster, or a bifsteak—with something *au gratin*! No imagination! I put in the so-small little slice of truffle, and a gentleman say, 'What ees zat black stuff?' I make a grand sauce with my *demi-glace*, and a lady say zat I have burn the gravee. Now this lady order apple pie and coffee—for the luncheon of a lady! Ah! She 'ave eat, I think, where the coffee it is made in one of those great engines. And it is a pity that we have not for her some canned apple pie; she would be one of those persons that prefer to eat with a can opener."

"But this is a free country," laughed Daisy. "We all eat and think what we like. This apple-pie lady isn't half as bad as the ones who *know all about* French cooking and order potatoes 'aw grattan'; and the worst pest is the man who insists on mixing his own French dressing at the table."

When the three women were served there were compliments for Daisy and her cook, and a good deal of merriment on the part of Miss Barton.

"If I put myself on your *reducing* diet, Ellen," she said, as she regarded Mrs. Merriam's cream-of-asparagus soup, "I might be something more than a scarecrow; but—dyspepsia, you know: coffee is killing me, and I'm giving it a decent amount of encouragement."

"And cucumbers, poor child!" she exclaimed, as she glanced at Miss Merriam's plate.

"Prince Solskevitch requires me to keep in good training all the time," said the girl solemnly.

"What for, a shadow dance?" demanded Miss Barton. "You listen to me, child, and eat some food, if you want to dance on solid earth. Swap diets with your mother, and you may both be fairly presentable in a few months."

"But I deny myself so much!" Mrs. Merriam complained bitterly. "I have stopped eating ice cream."

"Go back to it and enjoy yourself," counseled Miss Barton. "Might as well freeze the cream as make it into a pound of butter and eat it all on toast at one sitting. Your manifest destiny is fatness, my dear, and poor Faith will always be painfully sylphlike, so you'd better forget about diet at your house and die happy."

"I hope everything pleases you," said Daisy, as a waitress served Mrs. Merriam's chicken.

"Perfection—speaking for the pie and coffee," responded Miss Barton. "I must learn more about your establishment, Miss Smith. Have you secured a reliable bootlegger? A little secrecy is the proper thing, of course, but if I want a cocktail served in a teacup—"

"I fancy you'll have to go to your country club, Miss Barton," said Daisy quietly. "I'm not catering to that sort of trade."

"Dear me! I suppose I'll have to be satisfied with a cigarette," moaned the loquacious spinster. "I hope you keep my favorite brand."

"I have cigarettes and cigars for men," said Daisy, a little uncomfortably, "but I am going to ask my women patrons not to smoke here."

"Outrageous!" cried Miss Barton. "Are we living in the twentieth century, or in the painful days of Queen Victoria?"

"Awfully sorry to inflict my own prejudices on my customers," Daisy said with a smile of polite apology, "but I'm trying to build up a business on good food and good service, without appealing to fashionable weaknesses."

"Now, if Mrs. Merriam saw me coming, she probably tipped you off that I was the richest and most influential person hereabouts," said Miss Barton wickedly.

"You are perfectly horrible, Kate!" declared Mrs. Merriam. "You know I'm not a gossip and a chatterbox. If I told Miss Smith anything about you, it was to

apologize for your going about in that awful ramshackle motor car of yours."

"I knew you told her," said Miss Barton, with relish. "So my patronage ought to be worth something to you, Miss Smith. A good business woman would never let a little cigarette smoke stand in the way of success."

"Consistency is one of my weaknesses," said Daisy firmly; "I never make exceptions for diplomatic reasons."

"What, never?" queried the spinster, with irritating sarcasm. "You speak as a person of some experience, then. You must be a few years older than you look; you have met the world, and it is yours. I've lived some time myself, but I've never succeeded in putting a ring in its nose. Let's guess your age: you must be about—"

"I'm young enough to have enthusiasms and hopes, and old enough to refuse to be bullied," said Daisy pleasantly.

"Heigh-ho! Years don't always count," observed the other. "I fancy you gave your mother and your nurse a good deal of impudence when you were learning to talk. Some persons have a gift for flippancy, and no respect for age or position."

"If you'll allow me, Miss Barton," Daisy returned with some spirit, "I don't think you're old enough yet to be venerated, and I confess I don't stand in much awe of greatness that is based on wealth."

"Thanks for the compliment about my age," said Miss Barton a little acidly; "but I must say that one of Anne Sylvester's statements about you is borne out: you're a pretty pert young minx. However, you'll grow older—most of us do; and some of us get wiser—not all, by any means."

"Oh, here comes Anne Sylvester now!" exclaimed Mrs. Merriam. "And there's a strange man with her."

"Slow music, please," said Miss Barton. "Somehow the plot always thickens when Anne comes into a room."

V

MRS. SYLVESTER was a person not without variety in her moods, and on her third visit to the tea room of Daisy Smith she assumed an air of haughty good breeding and unruffled calm. Her companion was an elderly man of rather handsome and distinguished appearance, and his bearing was that of gentle benignity.

"This is Judge Yates, Miss Smith," began the lady, "the distinguished New York

attorney who attends to all our business. I have asked him to come to see you, as I want this matter properly taken up, without any further confusion or bother."

"Shall we go to the room that I use for my office?" Daisy asked courteously.

"It's quite unnecessary; we have very little to say," Mrs. Sylvester assured her, with a glance at Miss Barton and Mrs. Merriam which invited their attention to her manner of dealing with an inferior.

"We wish to close this rather annoying incident as quickly and simply as possible," Judge Yates said affably. "You know, Miss Smith, that the house belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, and that they do not wish to have it used for commercial purposes. I am sure that you will not be unreasonable about it when you understand their position. I shall offer you a fair sum of money to reimburse you for your trouble and various expenses, and you will doubtless be willing to vacate the premises not later than to-morrow."

"I can't see that the situation is changed," said Daisy, "and I have already given my answer to Mrs. Sylvester."

"But you really must reconsider," counseled the lawyer. "You are not the sort of person that would be willfully stubborn and unpleasant, I'm sure. Then, you must see, of course, that a legal contest would be very undesirable for you. It takes a considerable amount of money, Miss Smith, to conduct a contest of that sort, and you might not be financially able to carry it through, you see. My clients are quite determined, and—merely from a professional standpoint I should be compelled to make it rather unpleasant and difficult for you. I believe I've made it clear that your position here is untenable, have I not? Now, can't we proceed at once to an amicable settlement?"

"'Amicable' is hardly the word in a case where one is bullied and coerced," Daisy said soberly. "It's useless to say anything about fairness, but it does seem outrageous to use such methods to get me out of this old house that is really of no use to the owners."

"Ah, but my clients have the best of reasons for wanting the house vacated," explained Judge Yates. "They have wisely decided that the property is a white elephant, and I am now engaged in finding a desirable purchaser for them. The house is about to be sold, you see."

"Dear me! Who will you sell it to?" broke in Miss Barton, with frank interest. "It's too old to attract the most desirable people, and if you're rushing the sale you'll probably make a mess of it, judge. You'll fall for any one that's got good clothes and a pocketbook, and we'll have a precious neighbor here who made his pile as a war profiteer. It's bad enough in all conscience to have this Miss Smith open a stupid white-ribbon tea room and road house here, but the next thing you'll have some impossible boulder here raising chickens and potatoes in the front garden, and entertaining his Harlem-flat friends here over weekends with a player piano and a radio."

"I must say, Anne, that I have been talking with Miss Smith," spoke up the amiable and expansive Mrs. Merriam, "and I find her very agreeable and charming; I was quite surprised, I confess."

"Don't be absurd!" sniffed Mrs. Sylvester. "Miss Smith is not seeking to enter into our community life, I hope."

"We are not discussing Miss Smith," said Kate Barton, with characteristically bluff finality. "I guess Miss Smith knows that her case is settled already by distinguished legal talent. I am talking about what's to become of this confounded house, Anne! Here it stands, right in the heart of the colony, with the yacht club and the country club and everything else around it. Why in the name of conscience didn't you dynamite it when you moved out, and have done with it?"

"Perhaps it's because James and I have not the inexhaustible bank account of the Barton family," murmured Mrs. Sylvester ironically. "If you want the place obliterated, Kate, you'll have to buy the property yourself."

"How much?"

"Mr. Sylvester is asking thirty thousand," said the lawyer. "The house is not a new one, you see; but the location—the water frontage—and the—"

"Don't try any sales talk on me, judge," warned Miss Barton severely. "I know too much about Beacon Bay to have any illusions. I played hide-and-go-seek around the lumber piles when Jim Sylvester's father was building this contraption. Only a chewing-gum magnate or a retired high-jacker would give thirty thousand for it. If you really want to sell, I'll give you fifteen thousand, and my congratulations along with it."

"You are joking, Miss Barton!" protested the lawyer.

"I didn't mean to; don't laugh," she retorted. "When I deliberately make a joke, it's usually a ripper."

"It would get a very troublesome property off our hands," observed Mrs. Sylvester thoughtfully.

"Have you entirely forgot that I hold a lease?" Daisy inquired gravely. "I haven't accepted any settlement, you know."

"Listen, child!" said Miss Barton, coming forward into the group. "Are you rich or poor?"

"I suppose it's quite obvious that I'm poor," said Daisy.

"Then don't break into the conversation. The poor have no opinions or arguments; they are always ignored. You stand by, and if Judge Yates has any crumbs to scatter, you be ready for them, and duly thankful."

"I shall have an attorney represent me," said Daisy resolutely, "and I assure you that I shall not be ignored."

"Fifteen thousand," repeated Miss Barton, disregarding her and turning to the lawyer. "Take it or leave it."

"Mrs. Sylvester seems disposed to accept your offer, Miss Barton," he said, noting certain signals from his client, "and I gather that she speaks for her husband."

"She always does," said Miss Barton. "All right, I have one more superfluous and useless parcel of real estate to my credit."

She produced a tablet and check book from her hand bag, and sat down at one of the tables to write.

"Here," she said presently, "is my check for a thousand, to bind the bargain. Write me a receipt, please. And here is a note to my broker to complete the transaction. Be sure you don't bother me any more about it."

"Such a sale is not legal, of course," protested Daisy grimly.

"Here, if you must keep on interfering," snapped Miss Barton, "will you accept five thousand for your lease?"

"Yes, I will," said Daisy, with dignity.

"Sit down here, then, and write a proper release at Judge Yates's dictation. I'll write you a check for the money."

Mrs. Sylvester regarded Miss Barton with grudging admiration. The spinster was lacking in a number of ways the state-

ly, austere beauty which had made the society matron a subject for the art of some celebrated painters, and she was undeniably dowdy in general appearance, but she could command a trying situation in a manner that puzzled and piqued the lady of vanity and position.

"That's that!" exclaimed Miss Barton, after the required documents had been exchanged. "Is everything consummated to your expert satisfaction, Judge Yates?"

The lawyer professed himself gratified by the results that were accomplished.

"Tell me," the spinster said curtly to Daisy Smith, "how much were the Sylvesters charging you for the rental of this place?"

"A thousand dollars for the season was what Mr. Sylvester and I agreed upon," the girl answered glumly.

"Our original figure was two thousand," said Mrs. Sylvester unpleasantly.

"A thousand was twice what it's worth!" exclaimed Miss Barton. "However, Miss Smith, you should feel that you've made something on your sale of the lease, eh? But if you had some particularly big ideas—if you expected to make some big profits, you may give me back my check and keep on with your tea room. I'll lease you the house for five hundred a season."

"Kate Barton! Are you stark mad?" cried Mrs. Sylvester, whose indignation was exceeded only by her astonishment.

"But I thought you didn't approve of me, Miss Barton!" exclaimed Daisy Smith, no less amazed. "I want the house, of course, but if you lease it to me I shall not change my policy: I can't permit even the fashionable society leaders to smoke or drink here."

"That's why I'm letting you have it," announced Miss Barton, with a smirk of quiet amusement at the consternation around her. "If you had any horse sense, my dear, you would have known that a dried-up fossil like me doesn't go in for the fads and fancies of a brainless age. I was trying you out, and you didn't retreat under fire."

"You can't have the house, Kate!" declared Mrs. Sylvester savagely. "The deal is off; I won't sell it to you."

"You have sold it to me, my dear, sweet friend," returned the spinster; "and if you make any fuss over the deed I'll sue you for breach of contract—and you know that I can afford to squander money on lawyers

until you and poor old Jimmy have to mortgage your real estate."

"This woman!" muttered Mrs. Sylvester. "This woman needn't expect to make a fashionable success of her enterprise. I may not be the richest woman at Beacon Bay, but I can assure you all that no persons of recognized position will be seen entering this place. I have influence, at least."

"Is that a challenge, dear friend?" inquired Miss Barton.

VI

It takes more than one woman's experiment in conducting a wayside tavern to upset the general equanimity of an established community, as Daisy herself remarked to Miss Barton, and it happened that the advancing summer brought other diversions to the colony.

Mrs. Delarbe, the prematurely aged mother of Irma and Roderick, was said to enjoy poor health, but in earlier days she had taken a livelier pleasure in occupying a rather distinguished position in Beacon Bay society, not far inferior to that of Anne Sylvester. The untimely passing of Mr. Delarbe had sent the lady into a sort of mysterious retirement, and there had been rumors of a depleted fortune; but the handsome establishment had been maintained, and Irma and Roderick carried on the family tradition with mild distinction.

The years in their flight, however, provide a slow but relentless test for all conditions, and during this particular summer it was early observed that certain changes were creeping into the Delarbe ménage. There was no longer a butler, and instead of four maidservants there were two. Retrenchment was in the air about the villa, and the colony did not fail to note it.

Then, peculiarly coincident with the observable changes, came a perceptible cooling off in the fervor of Rex Raleigh's attentions to the beautiful and stately Irma. No definite announcement of their relations had ever been made, but for two seasons it was tacitly understood that a secret engagement existed.

Rex was accepted as the most eligible young bachelor in the colony, with a tidy fortune to his credit, and a quite acceptable family behind him; and Mrs. Sylvester and Mrs. Oaks agreed solemnly that his quite evident coolness and indifference toward Irma during the adventure on the island presaged ill for the Delarbe family.

"Quite naturally I have somewhat higher ambitions for Marian," said Mrs. Sylvester, "but I very much fear that Marian's younger and fresher beauty has had something to do with the alteration in Rex's behavior. The personality, too; Marian is so vivacious, so naïve and girlish!"

"Charming fellow, Rex is," said Mrs. Oaks, "but all these men are utterly fickle and irresponsible. Mrs. Delarbe should have insisted on a formal betrothal two summers ago. There's no sense in long delays. Melville and I were married two months after our first meeting."

"Of course a considerable fortune on the girl's side is a safeguard," remarked Mrs. Sylvester, without apparent irony.

"I dare say, in some cases," returned Mrs. Oaks a little sharply; "but Melville was a very devoted swain, and I'm sure his own fortune was quite sufficient. We all change, my dear, but no one will deny that I had some attractions when I was a débutante."

"I'm keeping Marian well in hand," said the other, changing the subject. "She's a mere child, and I mean to guard against any premature romantic entanglements."

Similar discussions of the affairs at the Delarbe house, and the bearing of Rex Raleigh's conduct upon them, took place in other quarters, but there were fresh diversions from time to time, and the impulsive and original Faith Merriam provided an innovation when she introduced Prince Boris Solskevitch to the colony.

That he was a dancing master rather stuck in the Beacon Bay crowd, but the Merriams insisted that his title was authentic, and he readily indorsed their statement, explaining to any interested person that he was collaterally descended from the most noble ancestors of the last ruling house of Russia. About his political future he was modest and evasive, but he would not deny that certain royalties more remote from a throne than he had been, had donned the purple in times past.

Regarding his present status, he was not evasive or diffident. He was earning a man's living by the sweat of his brow—and no member of the colony could gainsay that claim after seeing him perform a Muscovite peasant dance in the lounge of the Dunes Club, attired on that July evening in high enamel boots and a fur-trimmed smock of woolen fabric.

He was no ordinary dancer, and no ordi-

nary dancing teacher; Melville Oaks remarked that a man who could collect twenty-five dollars for permitting a pupil to cavort about his studio for half an hour was worthy of some respect, when there were some fifteen or sixteen such half hours in his working day.

The prince was the guest of the Merriams at their cottage, but they staged his initial bow to the colony at the Dunes Club, and the evening was made memorable by the appearance of Faith Merriam herself as the partner of the master in a stately interpretation of some delicate Arcadian fantasy.

The applause was generous, but well bred in its restraint, and Mrs. Merriam was ruddy with maternal pride and pardonable agitation.

"That full and flowing drapery is so becoming to Faith," Mrs. Oaks said earnestly to the mother.

"I absolutely insist upon it," said Mrs. Merriam, with gratification. "It is beautiful, and it safeguards her art against any suggestion of boldness or immodesty."

"And one would never suspect, with those sleeves caught at the wrist, that Faith was so—so very slender," added Mrs. Oaks, fearing that her friend had missed the point of her first remark.

"Pavlova is delightfully slender, too," countered the mother, a little defiantly.

"Ah, yes, *delightfully* slender," agreed the tormentor, artfully playing upon the emphasis.

Later in the evening there was general dancing, and the gracious Prince Boris unbent to the extent of tripping a measure with each of the younger and more attractive damsels.

"Your daughter!" he exclaimed to Mrs. Sylvester. "To dance with her is like holding very tenderly a beautiful rose. She is so lovely, so charming! In the dance her feet do not touch the floor; she floats upon invisible wings."

"Really?" queried Mrs. Sylvester icily, and the nobleman had received his first unequivocal snub.

"Your daughter!" he exclaimed five minutes later, as he singled out James Sylvester and marked him for an easier conquest. "To dance with her is like holding very tenderly a beautiful rose. She is so lovely, so charming! In the dance her feet do not touch the floor; she floats upon invisible wings."

"Is that so?" said James, and flushed slightly in his pride. "She is a graceful little girl, isn't she?"

"Graceful!" exclaimed Prince Boris, and hunched his shoulders, twisted his neck awry, contracted his muscles into acrobatic contortions, and gave every physical indication of exquisite agony.

"Graceful! *Monsieur!* That is to describe human beings! What shall I say? Your daughter, she is of the divine essence! I am an artist—I am very sensitive—I suffer in contemplation of beauty. Once in the life of an artist, *monsieur*, he has the ecstasy, perhaps, of beholding something sublime."

"Yes, I guess that's right," assented James, overwhelmed by the emotion of so temperamental a genius.

"You have a—a great responsibility—a great trust, my friend," warned the prince. "The gods send us their own angels, to show us something of their own beauty. Your daughter—forgive me, *monsieur!* She does not belong to you; she is sent to make the world more beautiful. It is enough for you, I think, to be called her father."

James coughed quietly and had some momentary difficulty with his cravat.

"Marian is a good little girl," he said simply, "and I've often thought that she was—well, uncommonly dainty and graceful, you know. I guess it would take her breath away if you told her that—well, what you've been telling me."

"Never!" declared the prince, with horror. "I would as soon stand in the presence of the gods and praise them. She is too rare, too spirituelle! Ah, my friend, is it possible that you feel some suspicion? Is it that you think I would give myself the honor of thinking that *she* could be my pupil—because I am an artist and a teacher? No! no! no-no-no-no! There are two great masters in Europe, but even they are unworthy. She could learn from them the technique, you understand; but they would be humble and awed in her presence."

"My wife," said James, uncomfortable in his embarrassment, "was always said to be a very graceful dancer."

"Your wife!" exclaimed the other, still thinking a little unkindly of that lady. "Ah, yes, yes! Very graceful, to be sure. Your wife is of another type, *monsieur*: very stately and patrician. Genius does not inherit its traits, my friend: your

daughter's grace and loveliness is from higher sources."

James had been profoundly impressed by the fervor of the man's protestations, but he felt suddenly that some of his neighbors were looking at him, perhaps having a little fun at his expense.

"Glad to meet you, I'm sure, Prince Sol—I didn't quite catch—"

"I am Prince Boris to my friends," said the nobleman graciously.

"Um— Oh, yes," said James, wondering vaguely from which of the two condescension should properly come in a democratic country. "Well, I hope to see you again. We must have the Merriams and you over for dinner one of these nights. Staying long?"

"Mrs. Merriam insists that I need the rest and the sea air," explained the prince, "but— Ah, my affairs! My art, you know, and then—things that I cannot speak of. Europe is—but you are not concerned with foreign politics, *monsieur*."

"I've a good deal of money tied up over there," James admitted ruefully, "but my bankers know more about it than I do."

"That is very interesting," remarked the prince, and his tone of sincerity carried conviction.

"Miss Barton will be offended if I don't present you, prince," said Faith Merriam, catching the celebrity as he left the presence of Sylvester. "She's right over here. Not particularly attractive, but sort of a duchess in this little place. She has so much money, and she's very kind-hearted and nice to everybody."

"Ah, I shall be charmed!" cried the prince, with lively enthusiasm.

"*Madame!*" he breathed, as he was presented, and turned himself into an acute angle by an amazing doubling-up of his supple frame.

"Don't do that!" protested Kate Barton. "You'll bump your head on the floor. Never waste all that energy on a woman over fifty."

"Miss Barton exaggerates!" objected the prince. "It is the ladies who are still young that can make jokes about age. You have not only youth still with you, *madame*, but a very keen wit."

"The prince is clever!" Miss Barton remarked to Faith Merriam. "He'll flatter me until he has me dancing Mendelssohn's Spring Song."

"Ah, but you have the lines of the born

dancer!" he exclaimed, stepping back and discreetly surveying her none too ample figure. "It was not long ago, *madame*, that you cut something of a figure upon the dance floor, eh?"

"Right!" she agreed. "They used to die laughing; and they cleared the floor when I started in. But I could play hop-scotch pretty well in my time."

"*Madame* is never serious, I perceive," said the prince ruefully. "Always the lively humor!"

"But the world has so many funny people in it," said Miss Barton cryptically, "it's a wonder we don't die laughing before our time."

"Your Miss Barton, I fear she was laughing at *me*!" objected the dancing master, as he and Faith moved away.

"She tries to be very witty all the time," Faith explained. "No one minds her, you know."

It was getting late, and the guests were leaving the club. The Sylvester trio were moving toward the veranda, and their car could be seen waiting outside.

Prince Boris bade them good night with a masterpiece of grace and ceremony. By a strategical maneuver he intercepted them for a moment, while Faith and her mother were hard by.

"Is it not most charming?" he said, beaming at Mrs. Merriam. "Mr. Sylvester has already done me the honor to ask me to dine with his family, in company with you, *madame*, and Mlle. Faith. Did you say to-morrow evening, *monsieur*?"

James was taken off his guard, and a ferocious glance from his wife utterly bewildered him.

"Yes, yes, to-morrow evening, I believe it was," he assented.

"Oh, that will be charming, indeed," said Mrs. Merriam. "Just a little family dinner, Anne?"

Mrs. Sylvester's eyes were glittering, and there was danger in the air, but too many others were already observing the scene curiously.

"Just a family dinner, to be sure," she said hoarsely. "There will be no other guests."

"Such an honor!" cried the prince, little comprehending his peril. "To be received in your home, *madame*, so—so *intime*."

"It's nothing," said Anne Sylvester, turning away. "We're not entertaining much this month, and Mr. Sylvester is al-

ways inviting people in casually. You may thank him, if you like."

Kate Barton caused her chauffeur to stop at the tea room on the way home, on the pretext of having a cup of really decent coffee.

"You don't miss much—not being in 'the set,' my dear," she said to Daisy Smith. "But I wish you might have been along this evening. There was a fair amount of comedy, such as it was."

"I dare say I shall enjoy it more in your report," Daisy suggested.

"There's always something new to promote the gayety of nations," Kate went on delightedly. "Now, poor Faith Merriam has dropped a bomb into the camp. A sugar-coated bomb!—a *bombe glacé*! But they explode sometimes, you know, and make an awful mess to clean up. I'll have to tell you about him."

VII

THE bomb, still intact, was hurled again next morning, and at the lovely head of Daisy Smith. Faith's interest in the prince, she assured herself, was purely that of the artist, and she permitted herself no indulgences as weakly feminine as jealousy. Then, too, she had her democratic principles to maintain, and the function at the Dunes Club had savored too much of the despised class distinctions.

"Meet Prince Boris Solskevitch, Miss Smith," said Faith as mannishly as possible, and flung herself into a chair in the tea room.

"*Mademoiselle*!" gasped the prince, starting back and striking an attitude, as Daisy bade him a simple good morning. "A thousand pardons, *mademoiselle*, but it is strange—I have never seen—your picture—anywhere."

Daisy looked somewhat bewildered.

"No?" she said quizzically. "But you wouldn't be likely to, you know. There aren't many pictures of me outside the family album."

"You do not comprehend the mystery," he said solemnly. "There are great painters—great sculptors—Why have they not found you? You have a great responsibility, *mademoiselle*; nature does not create such charms to have them concealed from the world, believe me!"

"In other words," said Faith, who was a bit bored by excessive rhetoric, "what's the use of wasting beauty on a tea room,

when you could be getting five thousand a week at Hollywood?"

"That is Mlle. Merriam's practical way of putting it," agreed the prince.

"Compliments are very pleasant," said Daisy, "but the prince pays them with the grace that comes of much experience. Won't you sit down?"

The prince sighed and sank languidly into a chair.

"I came to your Beacon Bay for rest and quiet," he complained, "and already I am bewildered and upset by beautiful ladies and charming society."

Daisy withdrew for a moment to welcome a party of six tourists who were hungry, but uncommonly polite and well mannered about it.

"Who is this young lady?" demanded the prince, with the easy familiarity of the master to the pupil. "Such beauty—incomparable! This is grotesque, that she should keep an inn in the country, is it not?"

"There's a mystery," whispered Faith, not unwilling to make the most of a situation that was not perfectly clear to her. "It's pretty generally understood that Smith is not her name. She always laughs it off if you try to question her. She came here with plenty of money, they say, and she's making piles of it now; the place is getting to be a drawing card for all the tourists that used to shoot through Beacon Bay at forty miles an hour."

"Ah, that is interesting!"

"It simply means, I suppose, that one more woman with brains has chosen to be independent. Women—and good-looking ones especially—get tired of being treated like pet cage birds by you foolish men. There's no sense in a girl's going on the stage just because she is beautiful; she may not have ability in that direction. This girl has education, and her manners suggest familiarity with society. Perhaps she will become the proprietor of a great chain of inns. Isn't that as desirable as a position in a movie studio?"

"The mystery is interesting," repeated the prince. "Beauty is my life! 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' you know. But great business ability, that is very fine, too; it provides the way to enjoy beauty. It will be fascinating to watch this Miss Smith."

"I've heard one man say that she is easy to look at," said Faith, a little wearily, "so

I suppose watching wouldn't be hard. Oh, you men!"

"You would not be jealous—of *me*?" exclaimed the prince.

"Jealous!" she echoed indignantly. "I don't know what you mean. Why should I, of all persons, be jealous of you? You are my teacher, and I am just one of your many pupils. That's all!"

"You would not be so cruel!" he cried, and reached out to seize her hand, but she withdrew it sharply. "Ah, you have not understood my interest in my pupil. You belittle your beauty too much, my little friend. You have art, and grace, and a charm that only an artist comprehends. As a teacher I do not betray my feelings—it is not wise—but I have come to this place to visit you and your adorable mother; I have declined scores of other invitations to come to you, my friend. You do not know how the teacher may live for the pupil; every master has at some time the pupil who is more than his own life to him."

"See you later," said Faith curtly, and suddenly took flight from the table and the house.

She was pursued, however, by the prince, who took after her without undignified haste; and Daisy Smith was puzzled and casually amused as she looked out the window and saw the self-reliant Faith flinging herself along the road, with an evidently expostulating dancing master trailing in her wake.

The methods employed by the prince in breaking into Beacon Bay society were direct and not without a certain practical efficiency. Faith pleaded a headache, and absented herself from the family luncheon that day, but the distinguished guest took a walk by himself after luncheon and paid a call upon Irma Delarbe, whom he had met the previous evening.

The Delarbes still maintained a stable, although it was reduced to a pair of saddle horses, and presently the prince was sent back to the Merriams' for his riding togs, to join Irma later in the afternoon for a canter along the bluffs.

The tall, stately blonde had been complimented extravagantly upon her dancing by the guest, but her accomplishments in equitation moved him to rhapsodies. Girl and horse, moving in sympathetic rhythm, constituted a poem for his æsthetic soul.

"You say that you do not sing, you do not write verses," protested the prince a

little breathlessly as they galloped along, "yet you are a poet, a musician, in every movement. In the really beautiful, beauty finds its expression in a thousand ways."

"I fear that I haven't impressed many of my men friends like that," said Irma, a little confused by the intensity of her escort's admiration.

"Your American men—poof!" he said contemptuously. "What do most of them know? Business! Money! Golf! Baseball! They are not educated to beauty."

Irma was a cold beauty, and she quarreled with her men friends more than she entered into any companionship with them. The prince's intense nature was something new to her, however, and she thawed a little under the influence of it.

"That I have never met you in New York," he said, "it is too unfortunate. Shall I have the ecstasy? How could I leave this place thinking that I should not see you again?"

"We live on Park Avenue in the winter," said Irma. "Of course we should be glad to see you. You must look us up."

"The summer will be very long!" declared the prince, as the horses came to a walk in tune to the sober nature of the conversation. "I am a very lonely man, *mademoiselle*. You—you are like the women of my own country—my own world. You have the patrician—the grand air; you are an aristocrat. Some time I shall live in that world again; Europe changes, as life changes. That would be the only proper setting for such a picture as you are, *mademoiselle*!"

Irma was naturally inclined to snub the man for his sentimentality, but he was a new specimen, and she found herself uncommonly diverted by his foreign airs and graces. Her life was a great bore, anyway, and there was no harm in playing with this peculiar fellow for the moment.

"Our ride is almost over," she sighed. "Pleasant moments are so short."

"*Mademoiselle*," he cried, "I would ride with you to the end of the world!"

He halted his horse, and the other animal stopped with it. He seized the girl's hand, and with a mischievous gleam in her eye she allowed her other hand to fall in his way.

"We met last night," he sighed, "and I—I have known you a thousand years. Love begins before life itself!"

He raised her hands with a gallant grace

and pressed his lips to them reverently, but with passionate ardor, and at the moment Rex Raleigh came swinging along the country road with creel and fishing rod, and burst upon the romantic scene with dramatic suddenness.

Irma stifled a little cry, but snatched her hands from the gallant with a force that nearly unseated him, and caused the horses to start in sudden fright.

"*Mademoiselle*," gasped the prince, who had not seen the witness, "do not tell me that I was deceived! You permitted me to believe that I was living in something more than a dream."

"Be still!" whispered Irma crossly, and reined her horse back into the bridle path.

"So sorry to intrude, really," said Rex Raleigh, doffing his cap with elaborate courtesy. "I wouldn't have interrupted a tender scene like that for anything, you know, if I'd had fair warning."

Then he cut into a bypath and disappeared in a thicket, and Irma was very unsentimental and morose the rest of the way home.

VIII

FAITH MERRIAM was already dressed to go to the Sylvesters' when the prince returned from his horse exercise, and she suggested with cool indifference that he had little more than time enough to attire himself for the evening. He inquired solicitously about her headache, and spoke casually of his afternoon with Miss Delarbe.

"Sorry I couldn't entertain you this afternoon," said Faith, "but Irma was a very satisfactory substitute, I'm sure."

"She is very charming," said he, but added an element of doubt with an elaborate shrug. "Perhaps I am wrong, but it would seem that Miss Delarbe is not of a sympathetic temperament; so cold, so reserved, like many of your American girls."

"You shouldn't make love to them on the first occasion," said Faith, and was rather proud of her bantering tone.

"Always I am misunderstood!" he wailed dismally. "And to be so misunderstood by you, my little friend, that is hardest to bear."

Mrs. Merriam joined them and hustled the guest off to dress. When he was ready, they walked over to the Turrets, and received a frigid welcome from the lady of the manor. Their host was nervous and distraught in the presence of his wife, but he

was responsible for the awkward situation—as she had convinced him by repeated assertions—and he labored valiantly to carry off the affair without further discredit.

There was dinner, in the oak-paneled dining room that afforded a noble view of the sea, but the table talk was not inspired, and the various viands were not such as are wont to linger in the memory of the guests.

When the hostess arose from the table the guests felt a sense of relief.

"You'll understand, I'm sure, Ellen," she said to Mrs. Merriam, "if I excuse myself and retire. I've been feeling a bit ill all day, and you'll get on famously without me. James is a capital entertainer, you know. I dare say Marian will play some of her little Grieg things for you; they're not bad. But don't let James turn on the radio thing, for I can hear it plainly upstairs, and I abominate it."

The meek Mrs. Merriam assured her hostess that she understood perfectly, although she herself would have died cheerfully at her post before she would forsake a single guest. Mrs. Sylvester disposed of further leave-taking with a haughty bow, and floated out of the room.

Marian dutifully played some conventional pieces on the piano, and the prince declared that she had the touch of a born virtuoso. He left his chair presently to lean upon the piano, and whispered to Marian that he must watch the most beautiful hands that he had ever seen fluttering like white butterflies over the keys.

He was vastly more comfortable in the absence of Mrs. Sylvester, and the evening was adjusting itself to his pleasure, when Rex Raleigh dropped in to pay a neighborly call.

There were how-de-dos all around, and everybody was professedly delighted, but Raleigh and the prince were both poignantly conscious of the afternoon encounter, and they sat down and glanced furtively at each other from time to time, while affecting to be quite at ease.

"If we could only turn on the radio!" James murmured regretfully. "I've had London several times, now, and we heard Big Ben strike the other day. It's very interesting. But Mrs. Sylvester doesn't care for it, and she's not well. Why don't you show Prince Sol—that is, why don't you show the prince the rose garden, Marian? It's as light as day in the moonlight, and he'd enjoy it, I think."

"Why can't we all see the rose garden?" inquired Rex. "It's a corking fine night."

But the prince was a bold and resourceful man.

"Would it not be more romantic if we saw it as Mr. Sylvester suggests?" he said quickly. "Mlle. Marian shall show me the rose garden; after that, somebody shall show Mr. Raleigh the rose garden. We shall take our turns. For me, roses are symbols of the highest poetic feeling, of the most sublime beauty. I would see roses in the company of a fair young lady, who understands them better than any one else. They are sisters, the roses and the *jeune fille*."

"Go on!" said Rex, rather roughly. "You've got me beaten at the post. I'm not playing when any one can spout high-brow stuff like that."

So Marian tossed a filmy bit of nothing in particular about her shoulders, as a protection against the night air, and guided the poetic guest to the formal rose garden that was shielded from the sea winds by a high wall.

"At last I see you with a fitting background," said the prince, with some emotion. "Roses! It is a scene for Tennyson—'Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,' you know. One lives, *mademoiselle*, to experience such moments as this."

Marian was demurely and becomingly silent and maidenly. Her father had fatuously whispered some of the prince's encomiums of the night before to her, and she was a little overwhelmed. She was a young and lovely maiden in a delicate, flowery way, but she had never before been told that she sprang straight from the forehead of Jove, and the deification was mildly intoxicating.

"The roses are heavenly, aren't they?" she said, and felt decidedly foolish and self-conscious.

"I am half Oriental in my temperament," murmured the prince, as they strolled, "but always I have loved the English poets—Shelley, Keats, and the tender Tennyson."

"It's great fun to read them, isn't it?" said Marian.

The prince winced, but the spell of the place was upon him. It was the most elaborate garden that he had ever seen, and the house—for all the chill that emanated from the hostess—was the most magnificent that he had known. There was no question of

the financial soundness of a family that dwelt in such state, and this girl was very good to look upon, even if her responses to his overtures were a bit vacuous.

With her small, slender hand resting like a feather on his strong arm, they walked slowly and dreamily through the orderly paths, and he gazed at her, at the roses, and the stars, and quoted glibly from the poets:

"Thou fair-haired angel of the evening,
Smile on our loves; and while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy West Wind sleep on the
Lake."

"I simply adore Shelley!" she exclaimed rapturously.

"But that is from Blake," he corrected, with the tender patience of a kindly teacher. "Your Shelley is more amorous:

"See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea;
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?"

Marian feared that the rendering of the verse was a bit too emotional and direct, and she averted her head.

"It's very jolly, isn't it?" she said.

The prince clasped the small hand that lay upon his arm.

"What are all these kissings worth, if thou kiss not me?" he repeated in a gentle whisper, and passed his arm lightly about the maiden's waist.

Marian uttered a sharp little cry.

"You really mustn't, you know!" she protested, and held him off with an arm thrust against his chest.

"Listen, adorable!" pleaded the poetic guest. "Have you no feeling for the spell of such a night? Look in my eyes! I am in Paradise! I am a man of the world, and I have admired beauty, but love—*love* has entered my soul to-night."

"But you really mustn't!" repeated the girl. "Mother would be—oh, just too furious."

In the house, James Sylvester was wondering if his lady were asleep, and if the radio would waken her, and Faith was yawning wearily.

An unusual sound came faintly to the ears of the bored and cross Rex Raleigh, and he got up suddenly.

"Excuse me," he said curtly, and went out rather hastily.

"It's very beautiful," Marian was saying again, "but you really mustn't, you know."

"Have pity!" pleaded the prince, with the anguish of a medieval lover. "So fair, so tender, yet so cruel!"

His arm was still about her, but he discreetly hesitated to press his wooing too rudely.

"Hey, there!" cried Raleigh, coming upon the pair. "Sorry to interrupt so soon again, but— Well, I'll say you're a fast worker, that's all. Let go the lady's hand. They don't all like it."

Prince Boris stood his ground, but released his companion.

"The gentleman is assuming some authority," he remarked. "The young lady's father— Oh, very well! But you are a visitor, like myself, is it not so? I should ask the young lady if she welcomes this intrusion."

Marian was panic-stricken, and she uttered one convulsive sob and fled to the house.

"You're a pretty bad piece of cheese, if anybody wants to know!" said Raleigh savagely.

"The gentleman is crude in his expression," returned the other loftily.

"Don't like that line of talk, eh?" growled Raleigh. "Well, I can't change any of it for you, Prince Flumadiddle. Prince, eh? They've got your finger-prints, I guess, in police headquarters, but that's all."

"And a very bad pun!" commented the prince, with artistic disdain.

"What's the use of a gas attack?" queried Raleigh. "I'm not out here to talk. I heard the lady scream, and I came right out to settle your case out o' court. The garden gate's locked at night, but it's over the wall for yours, and a quick get-away on the first train out."

"I am ready," said the prince.

"Ready for what?"

"To see which gentleman shall go over the wall."

Raleigh was unprepared for this defiance, and his rage boiled over. He hurled himself at the foreign invader of the inner circles of Beacon Bay, and sought to annihilate him.

A surprise awaited the young and athletic American, however. The prince met

him in mid career and grappled with him like a Turkish wrestler, and there were whipcord muscles in the dancing master's arms and legs and trunk. The combat was fast and furious, and in a moment the immaculate evening clothes of Raleigh were a sartorial wreck.

Over the garden paths they battled and struggled, and the poor roses were slaughtered beneath the heels even of him who had lately sung of their glory. Raleigh, finding himself in no mean combat, cast science and sportsmanship to the winds, and fought like a lumberjack. He butted the dancer with his head, ground his heels into the other's lightly clad feet, and tried for the treacherous and killing holds known to the fighters of the great open spaces.

The prince was having no easy time, however, and he breathed hoarsely and struggled fiercely for a decisive advantage. Into the graceful Italian sundial they hurtled, and knocked it from its pedestal. Into an exhibition bed of specimen roses they tumbled, and trampled trellises and bushes under their frantic feet.

Mrs. Sylvester entered the drawing-room abruptly, fully clad and with no appearance of having sought her couch.

"Marian is crying violently in her room," she said awfully to the startled James, "and there's a fight in the garden. Are you out of your mind, that you let thugs into the house?"

The guests listened fearfully, with their host, and to their ears came the crackling of branches, the thudding of blows, and a sound of men muttering and breathing gustily.

"We'd better go and see," said James.

"Oh, really!" mocked his wife.

James led the way to the garden, but with little eagerness. The ladies followed without hesitation, however, and pressed close upon his heels. When they came to the battleground, they saw the famous rose garden metamorphosed to a picturesque ruin.

They also saw the prince stagger to his feet, lift a grotesque scarecrow of black shreds and white linen patches in his arms, and pitch it with one mighty heave over the garden wall.

IX

PRINCE BORIS, contrary to the prediction of Rex Raleigh, left the garden as he had entered it, and stood again in the drawing-

room. He was minus a collar and a cravat, but his coat was virtually intact and little more than rumpled. Meticulously he smoothed his rumpled locks, adjusted his coat, and met the curious glare of the assembled eyes with a level glance.

"Can you tell us the meaning of this disgraceful affair?" demanded Mrs. Sylvester indignantly.

"There was a contest," he explained obligingly. "The gentleman who was here—Mr. Raleigh, I believe—requested me to leave the garden in a novel manner—by being assisted over the wall, in fact. I expressed some objection, and there was an argument. The gentleman went over the wall in my place, as it were."

"And you have the effrontery to be impudent about it!" said Mrs. Sylvester. "We should have the police in at once, James."

"There's only Jonas Strong," said James thoughtfully. "He might go over the wall faster than Rex did."

"It's quite like you all, to talk of 'disgraceful' affairs, and calling in the police!" exclaimed Faith Merriam belligerently. "Prince Boris is your guest, and our guest. He's a man—and you're not accustomed to men around here. He doesn't call for the police: he uses the hands that nature gave him, and defends his own right to live. Let's be human, I say! What's the use of living like dried-up Egyptian mummies in a glass case?"

"I think we'd better be going," said Mrs. Merriam timorously.

"Wait!" ordered her hostess. "I want to know the worst of this affair. My daughter is crying bitterly upstairs. Fetch her down here, James, and we'll have the truth."

A moment later the meekly obedient James led in a shrinking, girlish figure, red-eyed from weeping, and rather tremulous with fear.

"Tell us what happened in the garden, Marian," ordered the mother. "We want the truth, in justice to all."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Faith Merriam, in derision.

"I—I scarcely know, mother," faltered the girl. "Rex Raleigh came into the garden, and he was—he was very cross and rude; he used very rough and peculiar language, and—and I believe there was a fight. It was too horrible! I ran to my room as fast as I could."

"What was this—this man here doing?" thundered the indignant mother. "That is the question!"

"We—we were walking in the garden," said the daughter, "and the prince was reciting poetry—reciting poetry very beautifully. That is all I remember, I think."

"*Mademoiselle*, you do me too much honor!" cried the prince, bowing low, with his hand on his heart.

"Now, may we leave this temple of art and culture?" inquired Faith wickedly. "Or would you like to have the prince arrested for reciting poetry in the garden?"

"I shall be gratified if you will go at once," returned the hostess, who had grown very pale.

The difference between fame and oblivion is so small that the bubble, reputation, often bounces and wavers on the hair line that separates them before it settles to its place. Rex Raleigh had warned the prince to quit the village by an early train, and such a departure would have been ignoble indeed, but the morning found the prince sauntering pleasantly along the shady lanes, placidly enjoying the fame that had come to him overnight.

In the Dunes Club, the yacht club, and at Miss Smith's tea room, his name was on every tongue, and a legend was in the making. Rex Raleigh was reported confined to his house for repairs, and the fickle public had little sympathy for him.

The turn of a hand or a foot might have settled the contest differently: the other man might have soared over the wall, and fallen lower than the contempt of the people; but now it was known that Rex Raleigh had challenged the stranger to combat, and by the hand of that stranger he had been brought low. Greater infamy is not known in a community than that one of its own sons shall lose a fight with an outlander, so a proud and cultured populace denounced Rex Raleigh as a meddling booby, and regretted that his injuries were of minor importance.

"I'll take on that secondhand prince any time, and I won't land where Mr. Raleigh did," said Richard Wyndham to Daisy, as she gave him orders for the day's work.

"Heigh-ho, what a warlike people we are!" Daisy sighed. "Why should anybody 'take on' the prince, and why should Beacon Bay be so excited over an ordinary brawl?"

"It's so novel to have a good knock-down-and-drag-out in a millionaire's palace, instead of in the usual poor man's hovel. It restores one's faith in the balance of things; it's a touch that makes the whole world kin."

Miss Barton called at the tea room and greeted Daisy gleefully.

"As age creeps upon me," she said, "I get more frivolous. I've decided to give a dinner dance, and here at your place, my dear."

"Social triumphs are coming to me, little by little," laughed Daisy.

"This is the way of it," the spinster explained. "You know I simply couldn't abide that dancing master, but now he has pretty generally messed up Anne Sylvester's palace and used Rex Raleigh to tear up her rose garden, and I've just got to do something for him. He's a public benefactor: he has ruined Anne's peace of mind for awhile, and he has taken the conceit out of Rex, I hope. Then it's too perfectly delicious, isn't it, for the villain of the piece to come off victorious over all the pretty little heroes?"

"I'd never believe you were so vindictive," said Daisy severely, "but I shall do my best to make your party a success. The date?"

"A week from to-day. I'll send out the invitations. I only hope that my hero will last that long. Anne might have him assassinated, you know, for she's a fiend when she's crossed."

"You must keep him out of brawls," Daisy recommended. "Some of the men around here may have better muscles than a master of Russian folk dancing."

The prince, on his part, appeared to fear no foe. He promenaded the town, and seemed to invite attention to his freedom from scars of the late unpleasantness.

He encountered Irma Delarbe in his sauntering, and boldly declined to be snubbed by her.

"I don't know that I care to be seen talking with you," said she. "Your reputation has changed in the last few hours, not for the better. You made gallant and romantic speeches to me all the afternoon, and got me into all sorts of embarrassment; then you spent the evening making love to poor little Marian Sylvester. I'm sorry that it wasn't a better man than Mr. Raleigh that undertook to punish you."

The prince became very grave.

"It was an evening of folly, believe me!" he said. "I was in a desperate mood, *mademoiselle*. I would not speak unkindly to you, of all persons; but you were cruel to me. You permitted me to build the highest hopes for a beautiful future, and then you brushed me aside when that Raleigh fellow appeared, and you did not spare my feelings. I was desperate, I assure you, and it suited my tragic mood to beguile the evening hours with folly."

He frowned judiciously, and proceeded:

"Little Marian Sylvester," you say: that is it; she is a child with whom one plays—a pretty kitten. Picture my situation, if you please. This Raleigh fellow appears and annoys me for the second time in a single day—annoys me with his heroic foolishness when I am amusing myself so innocently. I am sorry for the fellow—Oh, yes—but he is very lucky that I spared his life."

Irma furtively surveyed the graceful figure of the dancer, not without a feeling of admiration.

"The casualties seem to have gone to Rex Raleigh's side of the battle entirely," she remarked.

"It was not a battle," he explained; "it was a matter of punishing a troublesome young man. I was not born yesterday."

"Well, it's rather amusing, after all," Irma said, unbending to a marked degree. "I shall have to forgive you this time, I suppose; and you may come around some time and tell me more about it. Shall we ride again?"

"Again—and again!" he cried joyfully. "For me the sun shines once more. When shall we ride?"

"Oh, drop in this afternoon, if Faith Merriam will let you," she added sarcastically, and passed on her way.

"Skylarking again?" inquired Faith, when he returned to the house of his hostess, but she was in a better humor than she had enjoyed previously. The dancing master was a man fashioned after her own theories, and she flattered herself that she was consistent.

"Skylarking?" he queried. "That is a good word, whatever you mean. I soar into the skies, singing my little song. But when my wings are tired I return to the peaceful dale to rest. You are so understanding, so comforting, my comrade."

"Sit down, then, comrade, and rest," said Faith, not displeased. "You are a

very funny fellow, Comrade Boris, but I think you have the right idea. It is every person's duty to live his own life, and that's what you seem to be doing all the time."

X

"SURE, we're all coming to the dance," Jerry Maddox informed Miss Barton, as he and Melville Oaks met her at lunch time in the popular tea room. "All, that is, except the Sylvesters. Horses couldn't pull 'em here."

"You're speaking of Anne," corrected the spinster. "Poor James would be glad to sneak in the back door, and young Marian is spoiling for a little fun in her life."

"Young Marian was evidently spoiling for a little fun the other evening," laughed Oaks, "but poor old Rex got all the fun, with a kick in it. Now *he's* spoiling for some more fun, but he can't think of any sportsmanlike way of killing the dancing master except by shooting, and it's closed season for skunks."

"If I start anything with that feller, I'll finish it, you can bet," asserted Jerry. "Rex is like one o' those folks that's always wanting to talk French, and can't do it when they get started. You'd think he was a grand little fighter, but when he gets into it he hasn't got the vocabulary to express himself, so to speak."

"Bear in mind that you're not coming to my party to 'start anything,' as you say," Kate warned him. "Beacon Bay society has become quite elementary enough, as it is, and I'm going to reform it. Every one will be polite and mannerly at my party, or I'll have Miss Smith's good-looking hired man right handy to act as bouncer. I'm glad that I've got an attraction at last, though; the prince is a real lion just now, and not one of your tame ones. Do you mean to say that Florence is coming to the dance, Melville?"

"She so intimated when she got your invitation," answered Oaks. "Florence feels, I fancy, that she's missed a good deal of fun that your friend the prince has furnished, and I'm afraid that she'll be disappointed if you rule out scimmages. She wants to see the barbarian that had the nerve to wreck the Sylvester villa, with Anne right in the house."

Oaks and Maddox had just left the tea room when Prince Boris arrived and paid his best compliments to Miss Barton and Daisy Smith; and a moment later the

Baron Rudolph Osbert came in joyfully, for he had been away from the colony for a week. He was a huge man, bearded and brawny, and he carried tenderly a small bouquet of garden roses, which he gallantly presented to Miss Smith.

"Ha, ha!" chortled the prince impulsively, as he witnessed the simple ceremony.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" cried the baron, turning upon him.

"No offense intended, *monsieur*," the prince assured him blandly. "A slight incongruity: *Haiden-röslin*—little hedge roses—for the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. But she shall have appropriate flowers. I shall send to New York for a supply of orchids."

"Ze gentleman presumes!" raged the baron. "I do not know ze gentleman."

"Very stupid of me," Kate Barton said dryly. "Permit me, gentlemen. Prince Solskevitch, let me present our good friend, the Baron Osbert. He comes from the Balkan Peninsula."

The two men faced each other and bowed stiffly.

"In the Balkans," said the prince, "all men are barons; it is very jolly."

"In America," retorted the baron, reddening under his tan, "all foreign jack-in-the-boxes are princes, it seems. Ze gentleman understands me?"

"I am at the gentleman's service," said the prince blandly, and handed the baron his card.

"Ah! It is ze whole Russian alphabet!" exclaimed the baron, and in his turn presented his own card. "I will ask my friends to wait upon ze gentleman."

"My head's in a whirl!" complained Kate Barton. "Are we living in Beacon Bay, may I ask, or in some Central American republic?"

She arose to depart in mock indignation, and the baron apologized solemnly, and escorted her out of the house.

"Poof! He is gone!" said the prince to Daisy. "I implore you, Miss Smith, do not leave the table now; I would talk, with such happiness, to the fairest of her sex. For such an opportunity I have remained in this town."

"You are so impartial in your gallantry," remarked Daisy. "But the women are finding you out, I warn you."

"Let them!" he said, snapping his fingers in contempt. "For one woman, however, I have the truth—the sincerity! I

have met my fate—here in Beacon Bay; I have lost my heart!"

"So sorry," said Daisy, rising suddenly. "I hope you'll find it again."

"Be kind!" he pleaded. "I have so much to tell you; and you will listen to me when you hear what I have to say to you."

"Some other time," she laughed. "I'm very busy to-day, you see."

Then she flitted from the room, and he got up mournfully and walked out; but he saw Irma Delarbe passing the house on her way to the Dunes Club, and his face brightened as he hurried after her.

"Any time you want any of those queer specimens put out, please send for me," Richard Wyndham said to Daisy, in the kitchen.

"You've been snooping," she retorted severely, "and you know that a hired man shouldn't do that."

"All the same," he insisted gravely, "please remember to send for me if you want any of them put out."

Daisy prepared the tea room for Kate Barton's party with devoted care. A decorator came up from the city with Chinese lanterns and various frivolous gimcracks for gay summer parties, and the choicest delicacies of the season were ordered for the dinner.

On the day before the dance, Daisy met Marian Sylvester in the village street, and the girl came to her and spoke excitedly.

"Oh, Miss Smith," she said, "you know mother declined the invitation to Miss Barton's dance, and I was so disappointed. But—I'm coming anyway—and you mustn't tell. I've promised to come, and I'll be there, at least for the dancing."

"I wish you might come, if you want to," Daisy remarked; "but I'd advise you not to do it. It might make a great deal of trouble, you know, and that would be awkward for Miss Barton."

"I've got to think for myself, once in awhile," Marian declared doggedly. "And I've promised absolutely to be there, so you'll have to let me. I thought you might explain it to Miss Barton."

"I don't see how it can be done," said Daisy, more firmly. "You surely don't wish to embarrass me, and it's very clear that your mother would blame me if you were entertained against her wishes."

"It's a little joke—a little game!" cried the girl. "No harm at all, and you'll understand it when you know."

She laughed roguishly and hurried away, and Daisy felt rather cross and irritated.

Faith Merriam was coming down the street, striding toward Daisy with a good-humored smile of recognition, and just then Irma Delarbe and the prince appeared on the side street that formed the corner for Jonas Strong's imposing store. The pair caught sight of Faith and turned in a sudden panic, hesitated like guilty children, then fairly scampered through the side door of the store to avoid a meeting.

"What's got into these ridiculous people?" Daisy said to herself fretfully.

"You're the busy little woman!" exclaimed Faith, stopping and giving the perplexed Daisy a mannish handshake. "Bustling about and getting ready for the party, eh? I'm not very keen on these society affairs, you know, but we'll have fun. Boris will do some of his best numbers for us, in costume, and that's enough, isn't it? He's so temperamental and eccentric, like all geniuses, but we're getting to know him better now. Mother is quite won over to him, and he has been the soul of gallantry to me these last few days."

They parted after a moment's chat, and Daisy went on, mentally talking to herself in her fretful mood.

"That poor young animal is certainly in love," she mused. "She's getting positively feminine in her delirium. And the genius is getting all the other young animals at sixes and sevens. A pretty climax we'll have for our party if this bunch of plots keeps thickening."

Miss Barton was waiting for Daisy when the latter returned to the tea room, with final instructions and arrangements for the dinner dance.

"And have you heard the latest thrill?" she asked. "Our dancing master gave poor Baron Osbert a sound thrashing this morning. The baron met him in the street and challenged him to a duel—taunted him with trying to evade him—and the prince gave him a drubbing."

"If the prince lives, and keeps out of jail, until to-morrow night," said Daisy, "you will have a star attraction for your party."

XI

MUCH against the will and better judgment of Daisy Smith, Miss Barton persuaded her by force of wheedling and blustering to participate actively in the enter-

tainment, and it delighted the whimsical soul of the older woman when she had Daisy, Mrs. Oaks, and Irma Delarbe seated together at a formal function. Anne Sylvester's presence would have been the crowning touch, but it was enough for one occasion to have Florence Oaks capitulate.

That little Marian Sylvester was present filled the guests with amazement, but it was too late to investigate the mystery, and she sat demurely silent and somewhat scared, under the protecting wing of the autocratic hostess.

Marian had arrived early at the tea room, and when Miss Barton and Daisy expressed their surprise and some natural uneasiness, she dissolved in tears and threatened a display of hysterics.

"I don't know what's to be done," said Kate Barton, "unless we spank her and send her home."

"I've got to stay," insisted Marian, between wails and sobs. "Mother thinks I've gone to spend the evening with the Wellington girls, and I can't go home. My heart was set on this dance, and I've got to stay."

"You're a spoiled child," Miss Barton asserted, "but you're so near a grown woman that you ought to be able to think for yourself. You stop howling this minute, and I'll let you stay; but you'll have to settle the matter with your mother later. If there's trouble about it, I'll read you both a piece of my mind."

Then the guests had arrived, and there would have been thirty of them, but for the quite understandable absence of the Baron Osbert and Rex Raleigh. Miss Barton had not failed to invite the latter gentleman, in her mischievous irony, and his formal note of declination had felt cold even to the touch.

It could hardly be said that Prince Boris Solskevitch was welcomed with warm cordiality when he arrived with the Merriams, but there was distinctly a flutter of excitement, for he had a title that had not been proved spurious, and he was a mighty man with his hands by right of conquest. Despite the vaunted refinements of culture and civilization, the accredited gladiator will have his following.

He was in fine fettle, too, and lacked only the costume to make a striking picture of the traditional *Punchinello*. He was never in repose: he pirouetted on his toes and his heels, eked out his vivacious con-

versation with a bewildering flutter of well-manicured hands, ogled the ladies with his flashing brown eyes, and flung ribald jests at the grimly critical gentlemen who were present. The more observant persons noted a furtive uneasiness in his bearing, and found his extravagant humor forced, but he had been making enemies at a lively rate, and might well fear the hour of reckoning.

After the dinner, which established a record for the tea room and its accomplished Swiss cook, the fifteen-piece orchestra that Miss Barton had imported from the city played selections requested by the prince, and he changed swiftly from evening clothes to the bizarre costume of a muzhik, and interpreted with furious abandon the weird melodies of the Steppes.

General dancing followed the program of the star, but, in his evening clothes again, he was still the star, and he selected partners with a certain gracious condescension. Quite properly he danced with the daughter of his hostess, and Faith was strangely radiant, with glowing color in her white face, and with a new frock whose flounces and furbelows violated all the ascetic principles of her philosophy.

Irma Delarbe became the favored lady for a waltz, and her classic features grew animated as she let herself go and entered recklessly into the spirit of the music.

Presently the prince sought Daisy Smith, quite artlessly the queen flower of the garden, and their dance together became at once the unheralded feature of the evening. Others ceased to dance that they might look on in admiration, and Daisy was a *Cinderella*, gliding over the floor like a veritable fairy princess.

After the dance the prince met Jerry Maddox casually at the punch bowl on the veranda.

"Who is she, anyway?" he asked earnestly. "Such dancing is not seen off the stage, believe me! And such beauty!"

Jerry quite frankly did not like the prince, and he leered at him.

"Huh! Don't you know?" he chuckled.

"Do *you*?" demanded the other.

"I wouldn't tell her real name," said Jerry, "but she's the daughter of the sausage king of Milwaukee. Don't let on that I told you."

The prince regarded him keenly, but Jerry became the picture of guilelessness, then grinned joyfully as the dancing master walked away.

Kate Barton was uneasy about Marian Sylvester, and kept her closely under her eye; but the girl eluded her vigilance, and startled the company by whirling into a giddy fox trot in the arms of the prince. Mrs. Oaks was scandalized, and there was a general murmur of disapproval; but the dance went on, and the unbridled delight of Marian beamed from her sparkling eyes for all to see.

Faith Merriam caught Miss Barton and drew her aside, and the spinster wonderingly regarded a face that was transfigured with happiness.

"We have a surprise—a startling surprise for your party," whispered Faith, tremulous with excitement. "Near the end of the dance—with your permission, of course—dear mother is going to make a little speech. She has consented to my betrothal to Prince Boris. Do tell me that you are pleased, dear Miss Barton!"

"Um—delighted, I'm sure," said the spinster frigidly. "You and your mother are both old enough to know what you want. As for my permission, you have it. And the sooner the surprise is sprung, the better—before your prince turns the heads of all the languishing females on the floor."

Faith was hurt.

"I thought you liked him," she said; "but you will when you know him better; everybody does."

Another dance was over, and the young and tender daughter of the Sylvesters, with unaccountable boldness, darted alone across the floor and captured the prince. She addressed him eagerly in low whispers, apparently unconscious of the witnesses, and he appeared to answer her patiently, but with a discreet word of caution. Then he led her to a chair and left her pouting like a disgruntled child.

Irma Delarbe was the next to cast dignity to the winds, and she caught him in his airy progress across the floor.

"Our dance, isn't it?" she asked with a sort of challenge, and he assented graciously and took her hand as the music started, while her brother, Roderick, gnashed his teeth on the side lines and demanded of Melville Oaks what madness had entered into all the women.

Soon the prince danced again with Daisy Smith, and he fixed his hypnotic eyes upon her shining blue ones, and talked to her softly as they followed the music. There was an encore, and before it was over the

two matchless dancers ceased, as if fatigued, and walked slowly out to the veranda.

It was getting late, and there were fewer dancers on the floor. Miss Barton swept the room with her eyes for Marion Sylvester, and was angry when she could not discover her. Irma Delarbe, too, had vanished from the scene, but her brother was still moving about in a bored and ill-humored manner.

Faith Merriam, holding her mother's arm, made a signal to Miss Barton across the room, and the hostess nodded assent without enthusiasm, but sent a young man to tell the orchestra not to play another dance until she gave the word.

Mrs. Merriam took a position that commanded the room, and instantly grew red with embarrassment. Faith had left her for the moment, and she looked to Kate Barton for support, but the hostess did not move. Faith returned and whispered to her mother, then darted out again, a flutter of excitement.

"I can't find him—I can't find Boris," she whispered a minute later to Miss Barton, coming upon her suddenly. "He knows that mother is going to speak now, but—I can't find him."

"They're irresponsible creatures," said the hostess ungraciously.

The crowd near the central door fell back suddenly, startled, and the tall figure of Anne Sylvester appeared in the doorway like a tableau.

"Where is my daughter?" she cried in trumpet tones.

Kate Barton hurried to her, disturbed and a little angry.

"A girl's mother ought to know where she is," she said. "I couldn't very well put her out, you know. What's the matter, anyway?"

"I shall have justice!" declared Mrs. Sylvester dramatically. "I have a letter—it was in Marian's room—she came to this place to-night to elope with *that dancing master!*"

"They've just gone!" shouted Melville Oaks, springing forward, as the crowd began to hum with excitement.

"We'll get that bird, and get 'im right!" cried Jerry Maddox, and the immaculately attired gentlemen swarmed out of the house to engage in a man hunt.

"Down to the beach!" yelled Jerry. "They might take a boat. Some of you

fellers beat it to the road. Get Jonas Strong—he's the police force."

In the velvety darkness toward the yacht club a horse heard the voices and whinnied shrilly.

"I'd swear that's one of my horses!" exclaimed Roddy Delarbe. "I'm going to see. Where's my sister, anyhow?"

James Sylvester was walking up and down outside the house, wringing his hands.

"What shall we do?" he moaned, as his wife stalked tragically from the house.

"Don't ask me!" thundered his wife. "You never do anything, you idiot, except make trouble for me. This was some of your handiwork, and you must be proud."

Jerry Maddox came hurrying back at the head of a small party.

"Here's the kid!" he shouted gleefully. "Waiting at the boat, she was. They had a launch ready to take 'em."

Anne Sylvester received her child in her arms.

"The brute!" sobbed Marian, regardless of witnesses. "He—he sent me to the boat—to wait for him—and he didn't come."

Melville Oaks returned, and shouted for joy when he saw the rescued maiden.

"I thought it was too late," he said. "There's a fine row down the line there. Roddy caught his sister holding the horses for a regular Gretna-Green get-away with the dancing fellow. She's ready to kill Roddy, and she is *going* to kill the prince if she ever catches him."

"My car is gone!" announced Kate Barton indignantly, as she came up from the street. "It's stolen, I know. I told my chauffeur he could go to the pool room where the servants go evenings, and he left the car here. It's gone!"

"That's not strange—this evening," said Oaks dryly. "The question is, where's the prince? Are there any ladies unaccounted for?"

"Where's Daisy Smith?" Miss Barton asked curiously.

"You needn't ask where she is!" wailed the heart-broken Marian Sylvester. "She went out with Boris—before the end of their last dance together. He lost his head over her dancing—and he's gone!"

"I don't believe it!" said Kate Barton, but she was visibly staggered.

Faith Merriam stood alone at the foot of the steps. Her face had lost its color, but she was grimly controlled.

"Good riddance to both of them!" she said harshly. "She was only human, I suppose—but she was a treacherous hussy!"

XII

WITH the loss of Miss Barton's car, and the disappearance of Daisy Smith and Prince Boris Solskevitch, definitely established, a gloomy peace descended upon Beacon Bay at the hour of midnight. Roddy Delarbe and his misguided sister had ridden home on the horses which were to have been turned to a more romantic purpose, without stopping to speak to the crowd at the tea room.

A tired and bored fisherman was interviewed at the boat landing, and he readily furnished the information that his small motor launch had been chartered that afternoon for a midnight dash across the bay, by a "smooth talkin' gent that looked like a furriner." An important detail was that no money had been paid, so James Sylvester reimbursed the man.

"It's perfectly bewildering—the duplicity of the man!" moaned poor Mrs. Merriam.

"Duplicity!" exclaimed Melville Oaks. "I'd call it quadruplicity: he had four strings to his bow this evening. I wonder if he shook dice for it, or did he say 'Eeny-meeny-miny-mo'?"

"He was so plausible and convincing," the lady went on, not appreciating the humor. "He and poor Faith were going abroad to study together, and he appeared really very happy about it."

"I hope we have all learned a lesson," said Anne Sylvester.

"I dare say you'll keep romantic strangers away from Marian hereafter," Kate Barton suggested.

"Quite so," retorted the other, "and I hope you'll be as cautious about unknown young women who force themselves upon the community. Surely you haven't forgot that you kept that woman here, when we were well rid of her."

"Don't say too much, Anne!" warned the spinster. "You might have to eat crow, you know. I've lost my car, and I'm as sore as any one, but we don't know that Daisy Smith was not kidnaped by that rufian. He's that type!"

"Ha, ha!" cried Oaks.

"She was an adventuress," Mrs. Sylvester declared conclusively, "and I knew it the first time I met her. Blue-eyed inno-

cence always arouses my suspicions. Well, well, there's nothing to be gained by assigning the responsibility now. I am only sorry that my husband was the first one to assist her in gaining a foothold here."

"It was unfortunate," James agreed humbly.

"Unfortunate that you didn't use your mental faculties to better effect," said his lady.

"I want to go home," moaned Marian pathetically.

"So glad that it still has attractions for you," said her mother.

"Take her home, for conscience's sake," snapped Miss Barton. "The child has been punished enough."

"Let's call it a night and all go home," Jerry Maddox suggested. "I haven't anything to charge up against anybody except that prince guy. I wanted to get my hands on 'im just once before he made his farewell bow."

Presently the Sylvester car was driven away, followed by the others in turn.

"I've just spoken with my chauffeur," Oaks said to Miss Barton, stepping back for a moment. "He sat in our car most of the evening, and he says a man and a woman came out the side door of the house and drove off in your car. He thinks they had a chauffeur, too."

"So be it," she returned curtly, and went into the house to tell the servants to close the tea room and put out the lights.

At one o'clock the house was dark and silent, and the streets of the village were deserted, but far away on a country road a motor car bumped and blundered through the night, with an engine that was vocal in its protests—for Miss Barton had not purchased a new car for three years.

"Adorable!" whispered Prince Boris for the twentieth time. "In all those distant worlds that are shining upon us, there is no creature as happy as I."

"But I say you mustn't talk," Daisy Smith replied in a whisper. "You keep forgetting this chauffeur. He will tell all that he hears."

"Bother the chauffeur!" he muttered petulantly. "Let him tell; we shall be very far off. Where shall we go, enchantress? To Paradise?"

He tried to take her hand, but she concealed it in the folds of her cloak.

"You are making me lose patience with you," she whispered. "Don't do it again.

I told you to be quiet. I won't talk, and I won't be bothered. I'm very tired."

"You must rest; you have worked too hard," he persisted. "We should go abroad—to Nice, to Monte Carlo. But we shall first visit your family, eh? In Milwaukee? Yes, dearest?"

"Not another word!" she said angrily.

"So happy—and I cannot talk!" he complained ruefully.

Lights appeared far off to the east, and the car passed scattering farms and houses. Soon an engine whistled sharply, and they saw its glaring headlight.

"We are coming to the town," he whispered gleefully. "Soon we shall be on the train; then, perhaps, I may talk."

The chauffeur drove fast and steadily, and they came into the town and stopped at the railroad station. Without a word the chauffeur went into the station, then returned and reported to his passengers.

"There's a train for the city in just fifteen minutes," he said.

"Fortune smiles," remarked the prince.

"Come, my life!"

He managed to seize her hand, and she clasped his hand in the conventional way and shook it, disconcerting him peculiarly.

"Good-by," she said aloud. "Pleasant journey."

"What is this?" he exclaimed, startled.

"This is no time for jokes, my dear. Come, come, we must go. Let the chauffeur take your bag."

"Come on, Jack, you've got to get this train," was the sudden and astonishing announcement of the chauffeur, who stood beside the car.

"What does this mean?" cried the prince. "What did you call me? No impudence, my man!"

"I called you 'Jack.' That's what your mother called you, isn't it?" replied the chauffeur.

The prince bounced out of the car in a rage.

"I punish such insolence as that!" he cried.

"We mustn't make a disturbance," said Daisy anxiously, glancing around the deserted station platform. "Please make him keep quiet, Mr. Wyndham."

"Mr. Wyndham," gasped the prince. "Then this chauffeur is—ah, you have made a practical joke!"

"Never mind; you've got to get your train, Jack; hurry up," said Wyndham.

"You used to be Jack Frean when you danced in the concert halls of San Francisco, so that may be your real name."

The prince made a vicious lunge at Wyndham, trying to catch him about the hips, but his chin came in violent contact with a hard fist, and he went down. He got up slowly and clasped his head between his hands, appearing to fear that there was some dislocation of the neck.

"I excel at the wrestling," he murmured, recovering his self-control in a way that challenged admiration. "You are a boxer, and you have a punch! I suppose I shall take the train."

"You're never to come back to Beacon Bay, you know," said Daisy gravely. "I'm sure you wouldn't care to; you might be killed."

"This is not the first time that I have been beaten by a pretty woman," he said regretfully, but nonchalantly. "What a pity that I did not take the Sylvester girl yesterday, or Miss Delarbe this morning. Those were their suggestions. I like too much the dramatic finish—and now it is my finish!"

"But I *am* a prince!" he declared suddenly. "Perhaps I was called Jack Frean; it was an assumed name; I was a refugee—incognito."

"Never been abroad," said Wyndham quietly, as though reading a record; "born in St. Louis, served term in reform school, acrobat and rider in a circus, dancer in concert halls on the Coast, conjurer and juggler in vaudeville, dancing teacher in Chicago and New York; picked up foreign accent for stage purposes, and assumed foreign name and title."

"It is remarkable," said Mr. Frean, "how accurately they keep these police records. And I was arrested merely for deserting a very troublesome wife, and choosing a more congenial mate. One makes mistakes!"

"It's almost train time," warned Daisy. "This man has a diamond ring on his left hand that I have seen Miss Delarbe wear."

"We will have no arguments now," said the man, and handed the ring to Wyndham.

"Any other keepsakes?" inquired the latter pointedly.

"A watch of trifling value," was the prompt answer. "I was keeping it for Miss Sylvester. And another ring, belonging to Miss Merriam. Here they are. I wish to be careful of my record, you see,

for I must start another career at once. One does not remain idle."

"With your talents," said Daisy coldly, "you might do much—and honestly."

"In the future," he replied pleasantly, "I shall at least be very careful."

A train rolled into the station.

"You have to take that train, you know," said Wyndham sternly.

"With pleasure," Freaan assured him. "Certainly I would not remain here in the wilderness, and New York is the place for fresh starts.

"You are a charming dancer, Miss Smith," he added, bowing himself away from the car, "and I thank you for a pleasant evening. The end of it was—I played an unlucky number, that's all!"

The train began to move, with a clanging of its bell, and he swung himself aboard and waved his hand in a graceful gesture of farewell.

"He's a fascinating rascal, at that," observed Wyndham.

"But that amazing record, how did you get it?"

"I sized him up as a man with a police record, and I wrote to a friend that knows about such things. I got it two days ago, and I ought to have acted more promptly. As he said, 'I like too much the dramatic finish;' but we're rid of him now."

He watched the train pass out of sight in darkness, then got into the car.

"Home, Wyndham!" said Daisy, and laughed gayly, with relief and a sense of victory.

XIII

KATE BARTON slept little on that disturbing and eventful night, and early next morning she went around to the tea room with a melancholy sense of duty, to close up the house, which was her property, and make some disposition of the cook and other servants. That she found the tea room already open for business, she attributed to the efficiency and excellent training of the servants, but the shock was almost more than she could bear when Daisy Smith herself greeted her with a cheery "Good morning," and invited her to breakfast at her favorite table.

"I'm awfully sorry about your car," said Daisy. "It was outrageous to take it like that, without a word. But it's being washed now, and I'll have gas and oil put in it when I send it around to your house."

Miss Barton's impulse was to take her in her arms and embrace her, but there were mysteries to be cleared up.

"Oh, what a night!" she exclaimed. "What—where—oh, why did you do it? These people here have flayed you. They'd put you on a ducking stool, or burn you at the stake, if those outdoor sports were still in vogue."

"I'm so glad I can explain everything," laughed Daisy. "But it's hard to be doubted and blamed when I did everything for the sake of the good name of Beacon Bay."

"That's music to my ears!" cried the spinster, "and I might have known it all along."

"Sit down and have coffee with me," said Daisy, "and the story won't take long in telling. You see, I knew that the dancing master was a rascal the first time that he made love to me, and I was worried about the reputation of Beacon Bay. I couldn't know everything that was happening in the houses of the aristocracy, but I have eyes and ears, and I did know that the people were all hoodwinked. Girls nowadays are so susceptible, and they're deceived most easily by the boldest rascals."

"They always were!" Miss Barton interjected.

"You have seen almost as much as I, so I won't review the case," Daisy went on, "but I knew early last evening that something more serious than comedy was in the air, and I kept my eyes wide open. Three girls were all aquiver with nerves and excitement, and 'His Highness' was hardly less nervous. He was wearing Miss Delarbe's diamond ring, but it was plain enough that he had drawn Marian Sylvester into an affair more serious than a flirtation. Faith Merriam's whole appearance told her story, and I knew well enough that the climax was at hand.

"I guessed at an elopement—the girls love them—but he couldn't elope with all three, so I listened and watched, and I settled on Marian Sylvester as the probable victim."

"Most money, of course," Miss Barton remarked. "You came near being right, I fancy."

"I thought of the ghastly scandal for Beacon Bay," Daisy continued, "and the wretched position in which the girls would find themselves. It was already too late to do anything as a preventive measure, and

not one of the people would have believed me if I had denounced the man. I decided that I had to spirit him away—get rid of him quietly, or there would be a scene, and a scandal, and no end of newspaper publicity. So I let the reptile make love to me, and I led him on until he selected me as the fourth candidate for his heart and hand. During that last dance we agreed to fly together at once, and we took your car.

"So I think I saved Beacon Bay," the girl concluded, "and, thanks to my hired man, Wyndham, the dancing master is speeding toward New York, on a train, and I know that he'll never come back."

"I'll take my car as it is," said the spinster, "for I have to run around to spread the report and gloat a little. But the man was such a ruffian! How did you ever get rid of him, and get him on a train to go away from these happy hunting grounds?"

"The hired man was very handy," Daisy replied. "Mr. Wyndham knocked the prince down at the start of the argument, for the moral effect, and it ended the argument. If you're going to tell all the people right away, I'll give you some souvenirs to distribute: Miss Delarbe's diamond ring, Marian Sylvester's watch, and a ring that Faith Merriam gave the man."

"My word! You do nothing by halves!" chortled the older woman. "What a sensation! What a triumph—for me as well as for you, my dear. And as for the hired man—for Mr. Wyndham—I'm afraid he'll take the place of the prince as the idol of the colony. Rex Raleigh was pulled off his pedestal by that bull-fighter, then the noble Baron Osbert fell, and it remained for your hired man to avenge the manhood of the community. Your Mr. Wyndham will be the man of the hour, and Faith Merriam or Irma Delarbe will be adopting him, or marrying him. Now, I'm off. Somebody might get to Anne Sylvester with the story ahead of me, and that wouldn't do. With Marian's watch in my hand, I'll annihilate that woman."

Daisy enjoyed an hour of rest after the recital of her narrative, then Faith Merriam arrived at the tea room.

Her gentle mood of femininity was dispelled, and she was even attired in a costume of masculine suggestion, with high linen collar and cravat, but memories of the prince still lingered.

"It was decent of you, Miss Smith, to

bring back my ring," she said gravely, "but are you sure you thoroughly understood Prince Boris? He's a person of vivid individuality, like Poe, or Byron, or Shelley. It isn't always right for us to judge genius. Some men are more than human, and we can't apply our standards to them. Kate Barton says he was only too ready to elope with you, but why shouldn't he be? You have more than one woman's share of beauty, and he worshiped beauty. He always said I was his ideal comrade; we were intellectual mates. Do you think you really understood him?"

"What I didn't understand seemed to be understood perfectly by Mr. Wyndham," Daisy replied quietly. "Mr. Wyndham had his police record and some of his life history. He was born in St. Louis, and his name is Jack Frean."

Faith took the blow standing, but she wavered a little after a minute and sat down.

"But—his education, his culture?" she said.

"He's a clever showman, it seems. He's been a circus rider and acrobat, conjurer and juggler, performer in concert halls, and all sorts of things. They say he cultivated a foreign accent for the stage. We must recognize his ability as an actor, of course."

"A police record!" murmured Faith hoarsely.

"He deserted a wife—one, at least, I believe, and he took another."

"Well, I guess that's all there is to it," Faith admitted. "It's nothing to me, now. My individuality suffers sometimes through too much sympathy, but I'm learning. I'm naturally a bachelor girl, and a solitary. This experience has been helpful, I suppose; after this I'll have no sympathy for any one. Individuals—they are the world makers! Any man that needs help or sympathy is a drone, unfit to survive."

"Here is Mrs. Sylvester," said Daisy nervously. "She's getting out of her car and coming in."

"Let her come; she can't irritate me any more. She's a drone and a parasite, and her daughter is a mere grub. They are quite harmless, once they're classified and understood."

"Good morning, Miss Smith," said Anne Sylvester sweetly, as she entered. "I've hurried down here to apologize to you, for misunderstanding you, you know. It appears that you sacrificed yourself for the

community, as it were, and saved us from a horrid scandal. Thanks for the little watch, too. My daughter is humbled, I may say. She has learned her lesson. It was a bit of midsummer madness, let us say, and the cure is complete. Please be assured that we are grateful. You must come up and have luncheon with us some day; we shall be delighted to have you. Again, thank you."

She was gone, and even Faith Merriam smiled slightly.

"How convenient! You didn't have to say a word."

"All I have to do, it seems, is to go to luncheon some day—but the engagement is agreeably indefinite."

More footsteps sounded on the path, and to the astonishment of both girls, Rex Raleigh came in. It was, however, a chastened Rex Raleigh. He was still wearing strips of adhesive tape on his face, and one eyebrow was not yet normal.

"I'm here to pay homage," he announced fervently. "You've vindicated my honor, Miss Smith. No gentleman is supposed to be able to lick a circus acrobat. I fancy that I did well to live through my encounter with the beast. I want to meet your hired man, too, and shake him by the hand. He is a man, and for that blow he struck he will remain my friend through life. Too bad he's a gentleman, though, for I'd like to keep him in cigars and cigarettes for the rest of his life."

"You'll find Mr. Wyndham working somewhere about the place," Daisy told him, laughing. "He's a gentleman, but he insists on being treated as a servant, so I will respect his wishes and not invite him in here to receive your compliments."

"He is one who has seen the light," observed Faith Merriam: "an intellectual who wishes to identify himself with the proletariat. Don't belittle him by calling him a gentleman."

XIV

JACK FREAN, otherwise Prince Boris Sol-skevitch, was gone from Beacon Bay, and he had tarried there only a brief season, but he left an indelible impress upon the colony which the ebb and flow of the tides could not wash away. It was known by the intelligent that a second generation would talk of the escapades of the debonair and muscular mountebank, and probably with more levity than the present one.

The tentative staging of four elopements in a single evening by a single troubadour seemed to establish Beacon Bay as unique in the annals of romantic love, and that the defeated troubadour departed at last with a jest and a gallant wave of the hand promised an added glamour to the legend as it gradually developed.

The social life of the residents was identified with New York and two or three minor cities where the winters are gayly eventful, but they gathered by the seashore summer after summer in a small, compact group, and the life here was more intimate and sympathetic. Young men attaining manhood after a score of summers in Beacon Bay had frequently taken wives from among their erstwhile playmates, and the summer was essentially the season of sentiment and romance as compared with the more formal winter.

Now, however, one of the annual comedies had suddenly turned out a tragedy, and certain lives were definitely altered. After Kate Barton's dinner dance Marian Sylvester was spoken of by family and friends in a lowered tone of deprecation or apology. The stately Irma Delarbe secluded herself at her mother's villa and rarely appeared in the open air. Faith Merriam was no recluse, but she grew perceptibly harder of countenance and heart, and stalked through the streets with the air of a woman who has lived deeply.

Anne Sylvester grew, if anything, more assertive and dictatorial, for her skeptical views upon humanity had been borne out in good measure; and only the confusion to her own family had robbed her of a personal triumph. James was cowed with an evident permanence, for he had been the one to bid the impostor welcome to his own house, and smooth the way of conquest for him.

Even Kate Barton was stamped, for she had fêted and exploited the destroyer with gusto at the very crisis of his escapade, and set the scenes for him; but she was a veteran of many campaigns, and she held her head no less high, and challenged every critic with a dangerous gleam in her unwavering eyes.

Immediately after the episode the residents watched the city newspapers with fevered eyes, but days passed, and it seemed that their fears were groundless. Beacon Bay had always been let alone, for it was a small colony, and no newspaper thought

it worth while to maintain a regular correspondent there. When there were society notes that needed publishing, Mrs. Sylvester's social secretary sent them to the proper newspapers, and thus the community was more or less protected from undesirable contact with the world in that direction.

A week after the episode, however, all its agonies were lived over again by the residents. The dagger was plunged to the heart of the community again, and twisted about for added torture. A scurrilous sheet of ill repute in the city published a half page story of the affair, omitting neither names nor details, and mysteriously obtained photographs of the Sylvesters and the Merriams were reproduced.

Mrs. Sylvester was for making a libel suit out of it immediately, but Roddy Delarbe, the lawyer, counseled a dignified silence, for the newspaper was powerful and widely circulated, and it was better, he said, to let the horrible document die as a nine-days' wonder.

The ill wind blew business to Beacon Bay for Daisy Smith's tea room, until she was forced to crowd additional tables into the dining room and place others on the veranda. The readers of that newspaper wanted to see the mansions where the dancing prince had flourished and wooed the haughty society belles, and they wanted to eat at the tea room which had been his Waterloo.

The rush was kept up for a week, and then it abated, but not to the former level of tourist business. The cooking at the tea room was making fame and success for its proprietor, and the unexpected free advertising in the newspaper furnished a boost that put the establishment into the class of profitable enterprises.

Daisy was alive to the opportunity, and she consolidated her position. An experienced head waiter was brought from the city, and the Swiss cook was provided with two assistants.

The colony had feared a possibility of such success early in the summer, but now Daisy was in growing danger of being taken to their hearts, and they applauded her triumph. No longer was the grill of the Dunes Club the social forum of the community: multi-millionaires, millionaires, and demi-millionaires of Beacon Bay lunched at "Miss Smith's Tea Room;" their wives and children took tea and ices there of an afternoon; whole families came

down from the rarefied atmosphere of the bluffs in the evening and dined there again and again.

In mid August—and perilously near the end of the season—a squadron of carpenters attacked the old house on the side next the sea, and in a week had added a broad open terrace, to be covered and shaded with gay awnings. Fifty new tables were spread on this terrace, another head waiter was added to the staff, and a bevy of attractive waitresses appeared. There was a business-like office in the second story of the house now, with a young woman for clerk and typist, and Daisy sat at a desk and pushed bell buttons and conferred with business people by telephone.

One evening a smart little sedan, done in blue and silver, stopped at the house, and Sylvester, Oaks, Raleigh, and Maddox alighted and called for Miss Smith. When she appeared, Melville Oaks—habitually the spokesman of that quartet—made an informal speech.

"Your carriage awaits, Miss Smith," he announced, with a sweeping gesture toward the new sedan. "The men and women of Beacon Bay have long wanted to present you with some modest token of their appreciation and esteem, and it has occurred to them recently that the popular proprietor of their favorite rendezvous should not be allowed to walk in the street when she might ride. The car is a gift to you from the summer residents of the community which you have enriched with your presence."

Daisy thanked them very fervently, but her eyes were suspiciously bright, and she declined to make a speech when Jerry Maddox called for one.

"Then we would see your mysterious gardener and handy man, Mr. Wyndham," Oaks requested. "He, too, has been a public benefactor. We respect his incognito and whatever dark secret he may cherish, but we esteem him so highly that we would be gratified to see him occupy a post of greater dignity. To be a 'hired man' is nothing discreditable, but to remain one reflects upon the person's ability."

Daisy sent a waitress to find Wyndham, and he appeared presently in his khaki working clothes.

"Mr. Wyndham, man of mystery," said Oaks, "it is our misfortune that we know you only as Miss Smith's highly cultivated and gentlemanly gardener, and as a valiant

exterminator of social vermin. We have hesitated to force our attentions upon you, but the men and women of the summer colony hope that you will accept the very conventional gift of this watch, merely as a token of their gratitude for your efficiency in dealing with wild princes and other predatory animals."

Wyndham, very clean cut and handsome, even in dusty khaki, took the costly gold timepiece in his hand and bowed with some natural dignity.

"The opportunity to gratify a natural impulse in dealing with the person you have reference to was sufficient reward in itself," he said; "but I am grateful to the ladies and gentlemen of Beacon Bay for this handsome token, and I shall treasure it, I assure you."

He started to turn away, but Daisy checked him.

"These gentlemen have taken me to task, Mr. Wyndham," she said, "because I have appeared to keep you submerged; they think I have failed to recognize and reward merit. In self-defense, I have to offer you promotion in their presence. They have given me that handsome sedan, you see, and I must do something to gratify their desires. I have great confidence in your ability, and I shall be glad to have you take the position of my private secretary, at a considerable increase in salary."

"The offer is very flattering, Miss Smith," Wyndham replied, "but I am not dissatisfied with my present job."

"But the people *are* dissatisfied with it!" she protested, a little impatiently. "You can't have everything your own way after you have become popular. My authority must be respected, and I insist that you give up the position of gardener to some less worthy person."

"I'll compromise," said Wyndham, with a twinkle in his eye. "I'll be your chauffeur. You have already seen me drive a car, and if I am satisfactory in that capacity, the job will be quite to my liking."

"Is it agreeable to the community?" asked Daisy, turning to the other men with mock gravity.

"It may do for the present," agreed Oaks. "When you install elevators in your tea room, the young man may go up in the world; in the meantime, as your chauffeur, he will at least be making some progress, if he doesn't forget to fill the gas tank."

Oaks, Sylvester, and Maddox said good

evening and walked over to the Dunes Club, for billiards, but Rex Raleigh lingered.

"That was bully!" he said to Daisy earnestly. "Old Beacon Bay is a hard-shelled sort of a place to break into, but I knew as soon as you came here that you'd win them. The snobbery is on the surface, you see: when they have tried you out, you're taken right into the family. When are you going to try your new car? Want me to show you its paces?"

"I think that would be very nice," she agreed politely, and they got into the car.

Rex drove out over the bluffs and along the seashore, and on a lofty headland he stopped the car and invited her attention to the broad view of the ocean.

"I hope you really appreciate how much the people here have accepted you as one of them," he remarked presently. "And you're still a mystery, too. They still believe that you're masquerading; that you've run away from home, perhaps, to try conclusions with the world. I don't know what to think about it myself, but it wouldn't surprise me if Miss Smith turned out to be a particularly well known person in some part of the country."

"The uncertainty is rather disturbing, isn't it?" Daisy asked lightly. "What if the ultimate surprise should be a rude one?"

"We're not at all disturbed," he said reassuringly. "I wish you might know how little I care what your name really is. When one looks at you once, there can't be any more doubt or lack of confidence. It's the same with that man Wyndham, in a way: he convinces you that he's a gentleman when he looks at you. He's the mystery, however, that I puzzle my head about. Don't you really know anything about him? Doesn't he excite your curiosity as to his identity?"

"I really don't know anything about him," she declared convincingly. "And I haven't had time to be puzzled about him to any extent."

"I'm glad of that," he said heartily. "I'll confess that I've worried about that man ever since he came here. I don't want to bore you, but—I dare say you know that Irma Delarbe and I have been very good friends for a long time."

"I think I've heard so," Daisy replied. "It's a little awkward," he said uneasily. "They're blaming me, you know, for—oh, they say that I've neglected Irma and

made her unhappy. The trouble is that a man isn't altogether responsible for those things. The head has to listen to the heart sometimes. You'll forgive me, won't you? I have to tell you about it. Irma hasn't meant anything to me since the first afternoon that I saw you in Beacon Bay."

"I think it's quite time for us to go home," Daisy announced, and tried to laugh.

"You're not the sort to have contempt for a fellow's feelings," he persisted. "You'll at least hear me out, won't you? A man has dreams, you know, and they're pretty sacred things. It's frightful to have them blasted. You're the only beautiful dream I've ever had; the only one I ever shall have. I tried to let Irma down easy; but we were never more than very good friends. I never began to live until I saw you."

"Just a moment, Mr. Raleigh," said Daisy soberly. "I appreciate the compliment you have paid me, but there's only one reasonable way of looking at these matters. I'm sure you don't think that a woman ought to marry a man just because he says he loves her devotedly, do you?"

"Sincere devotion is not a common thing," he asserted. "Of course the girl ought to care for the man, too, but she can't always do that until she knows him well. It's not often love at first sight with both parties."

"A man so often demands love, just because he's attracted to the woman," Daisy went on philosophically. "Then the woman feels a certain responsibility, and it often happens that propinquity does the rest. Later on, she finds that she never could love him anyway—when it's too late."

"It's decent of a girl to give a fellow a chance, though," he argued. "I'm not unreasonable, I think. You might give me a chance. I'll be a probationer as long as you say. I've worshiped you ever since you came here, but you've never taken the trouble to get acquainted with me. You don't know how serious I am—how desperate I am about it. I wouldn't ask you where you came from; I don't care what your name is. I want your name to be Raleigh, and that's all I care about in the world."

"I can't give you a chance, Mr. Raleigh," she said, "when there isn't any chance to give you. If I must be frank, you're not the sort of a man I could be in-

terested in. I haven't taken the trouble to get acquainted with you, because I have known all I wanted to know about you. You are a little spoiled, a little conceited, and not scrupulously truthful. When you lost interest in Miss Delarbe, you were not so desperately devoted to your dreams of me that you could not begin to pay marked attention to Marian Sylvester. I'm not a gleaner of gossip, but it's well known that you made yourself conspicuous by dancing attendance on Miss Sylvester as soon as you found yourself weary of your older friend."

"Aren't you taking liberties, Miss Smith?" he asked crossly.

"Didn't you take liberties?" she countered. "You're not a good sportsman, Mr. Raleigh. Your side of any case is the only important one to you. Miss Delarbe gave you her time, and a good deal of devotion, I'm told. She's a beautiful girl, and a girl that many men would adore, but you monopolized her society until you discovered that Marian Sylvester was younger, prettier, and—yes, wealthier; then you 'let her down easy,' as you say, and in her pique and disappointment and humiliation, she made herself ridiculous with that dancing master—trying to show you that some man really cared for her."

Rex started the car for home.

"Thus endeth the first lesson," he said, sardonically.

"Probably not the last," retorted Daisy. "Selfish persons have a good many lessons offered them, and sometimes they listen and profit by them."

He drove the car back to the tea room, and they parted rather coldly.

"I warn you, I never give up," he asserted. "I can wait."

"But you'll manage to find diversions while you're waiting," she returned, "so life won't be so unbearable."

Kate Barton was waiting for her on the veranda.

"Vixen!" she cried. "I come around here to admire your new car, and you're out skylarking with Rex Raleigh. Don't you know you'll turn that fellow's head?"

"I've turned it already, it seems," said Daisy, wearily. "But I turned it all the way around, and faced him about in the way he should go."

XV

It had seemed to Beacon Bay that with that one elaborate and unlovely splurge of

publicity the humiliation might end, but it was not so to be. The story attracted not only the gossip-loving public, but the professional purveyors of gossip as well. Newspapers awakened to the fact that Beacon Bay had been overlooked for years as a source of human interest material, and Beacon Bay was promptly restored to the journalistic map. The jaundiced journal that featured the original story of the dancing prince followed up the achievement with sundry notes on Beacon Bay's human comedy in a column regularly devoted to such matter.

The building up of a successful tea room business by "a mysterious and beautiful unknown who intrigued the male population of the exclusive summer resort under the *nom de guerre* of Smith," was set forth in a style that nauseated the friendly reader and delighted the vulgar. Daisy Smith was represented as a female captain of industry whose profits were carrying her rapidly along toward the ranks of millionaire producers of films.

In another issue the "beautiful unknown" was pictured as a snarer of hearts who was upsetting the domestic serenity of the conservative colony, attracting the susceptibles not only with her blue eyes and golden hair, but with a golden lure in the coin of the realm.

Presently this line was followed with more intimate details at the expense of Rex Raleigh: "A popular young bachelor, bearing the surname of a famous gallant of the Elizabethan court, is reported to have flouted the affections of at least two popular débutantes in order to cast his cloak before the feet of the rich and beauteous tea room queen, only to be spurned by her majesty, whose tiara is set for bigger game."

A Southern gallant, reading this of himself in a Southern journal, would have relieved the situation by trouncing the editor with a walking stick, but tangible, flesh-and-blood editors are neither discoverable, nor accessible, in the offices of such publications. Rex Raleigh had to content himself with calling a meeting of his cronies at the Dunes Club; he had lately ceased to be a habitué of the tea room.

"I'm blessed if I know what's to be done about this damnable rot!" he roared to an audience composed of Sylvester, Oaks, Maddox, and Delarbe. "It's not myself I'm thinking of so much, but the — the women? Who's to protect them?"

"I should certainly write a letter of spirited protest," James Sylvester declared. "Write it," Jerry Maddox suggested derisively, "and then mail it in the nearest ash can; you'll save a postage stamp."

"I've always enjoyed a certain influence with the better class of papers," announced Oaks, "but I believe there's only one possible argument with papers of this kind—a check book."

"I'm not buying 'em off, I assure you," Rex hastened to inform them. "That would start a pretty mess of blackmail."

"Nobody seems to have thought of digging for the root of the trouble," remarked Jerry sagely. "New York reporters ain't coming up here every day to get the dope on us; somebody right here in the middle of us is sending it in to 'em. Get that guy, whoever he is, and I'll be one of a party of gents to cure 'im of the habit."

"That's perfectly reasonable," seconded Roddy Delarbe. "But how are you going to trace the source, even in a small place like this? By Jove! It's inconceivable that a gentleman or a lady would be guilty of such an outrage; but how about the servants? There's money in it, and the servants hear all the gossip that's going round."

"You'd better get a private detective agency to send you a man, then," advised Oaks. "We can't assemble all the servants in Beacon Bay and cross-question them. A detective would run the culprit to earth in a short time."

"I suppose we should ignore the filthy stuff and let it die out by itself," said Rex. "I hate to acknowledge that they've got my goat, by laying out money on detectives and all that sort of thing."

"You're the lad that's hit the hardest, so far," chuckled Jerry. "If it ain't worth money to you to stop it, what are we wasting valuable time here for, I'd like to know?"

"Tell you what I'll do, Rex," Roddy suggested, brightly. "I'll take on the job, and it'll cost you nothing. Keep it dark! I can do a little gum-shoeing without arousing suspicion, and I may get some results. I guarantee nothing, but I'm interested."

"All right, let it go at that," said Jerry, with relief. "If we see any guy with green goggles and blue whiskers pussyfooting around the back yards, we'll know it's Roddy, hot on the trail."

Meanwhile, the spicy notes on Beacon Bay continued in the paper, and not even

the most indignant members of the colony failed to obtain copies of the sheet and read them.

Kate Barton was referred to as "a sporting duchess of doubtful age whose dormant emotions had been stirred by the sprightly antics of the bogus prince." Anne Sylvester was the "Victorian chatelaine of the Turrets, whose patrician head was held too high for her to obscure the unconventional gamboling of her sub-deb daughter." Irma Delarbe could be recognized instantly in "the stately beauty who had waited too long for a noble prince to claim her, and was disposed at last to take up with the imitation article that lately pirouetted across the horizon."

"At my age, to get into the newspapers!" chuckled Kate Barton to her favorite confidante, Daisy. "And here are Rex Raleigh and the rest of them holding indignation meetings! I'd be inclined to write a letter to the editor and thank him for his flattering attention."

"I'm too busy to think very much about it," said Daisy, "but I'm wondering what developments may follow. Just now, most of my mail is from brokers who want me to buy stocks and bonds. A Hollywood producer has written for my photograph, and a complexion cream manufacturer offers me a hundred dollars for a photograph and a testimonial letter."

The offensive paragraphs were having their effect upon all manner of readers of the paper, according to their several angles of vision, and one morning three stout and pompous men of business descended from a big motor car and called upon Daisy while she was sitting at a late breakfast with Miss Barton. The men were invited to her office, but they preferred to sit in the dining room and take notes on the customers who came and went.

"You're pretty young, Miss Smith, to run a business like this," said one of the men, staring at Daisy frankly. "This lady—your mother, I suppose?"

"My friend, Miss Barton," Daisy explained a little frigidly. "Miss Barton is the owner of the building."

"That's all right, then; she can stay," the man announced graciously. "We've come out to buy the place if it looks good. I hear you're cleaning up on it, Miss Smith."

"I've done very well," Daisy replied coldly.

"How well?" demanded another one of the trio. "Can you show us your books?"

"Certainly not," said Daisy. "I haven't offered my tea room for sale, and I'm not anxious to talk about it."

"It's business," explained the man. "A lot of people are coming out here. I've read about it, and I've got private information. Me and these two gentlemen, we've got about a hundred inns and tea rooms now, in four States. Pretty fair development, ain't it? Maybe we'll take on this one. What's your price for the business and the layout?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," said Daisy, and almost lost her breath.

"That's all right," chuckled the man appreciatively. "You'll be a business woman some day, my dear. I'll give you five thousand, spot cash, and you're a lucky girl."

"I don't want to sell," she insisted. "That's why I said fifty thousand. I wouldn't take forty thousand, nor forty-five. I want to be here again next summer. It takes one summer to establish the business."

"Too bad you don't know when you've got a good offer," said the man pityingly. "Five thousand don't grow like berries on a bush. You see we'll come here anyhow—'cause the people are coming here now; you've got 'em coming! We'll put up a place that'll make this look like a barber shop. You're bucking a corporation, young lady. We can stick up a regular Ritz hotel out here in a couple o' months, and have the autos lined up six deep around it. Maybe you can feed the chauffeurs; they have to eat, too."

"Where are you going to build your skyscraper tea room?" Kate Barton inquired with languid interest.

"Anywheres out here," said the spokesman of the three. "Right across the road, there, like as not. There's plenty o' land out here. We'll start something! That beach can be developed. We might stick up a hotel next year, if it looks good."

"I own the beach—all of it," she informed him, "and it's not in the market."

"Huh! You'll change your mind; they all do," he declared confidently.

"I never change my mind, once it's finally made up."

"All right," said the man, grinning, "we're not fussin' about that now. If Miss Smith don't want a check for five thousand, we'll go out and see some real estate feller."

"I'm the only real estate feller here," said Kate, "because I own everything below the bluffs, except the two clubs and one or two parcels up by the post office. I haven't anything for sale."

"Huh! You own the whole blame' town, do you?" he gasped. "Well, you never can judge by appearance. I suppose we can buy the post office if we want to."

"It's off the motor road, where the cars come through the town," she explained. "The State highway is five miles inland, but the automobiles make a detour to see the bay. It happens that I own the road. You'll see two big posts right out here. Once in a while I have a chain hung across the road for twenty-four hours, and that keeps it from becoming a public road. Now, what are you going to do? I might get mad, you see, and shut the road off altogether from traffic."

"Good morning, ladies," said the spokesman, and rose with his two companions. "I take off my hat to money when it's in carloads. We can't afford to bother with an inn, if it means buying a whole county."

"Bluff *versus* bluff!" chuckled Kate, when the men had gone. "I knew they wouldn't stop to investigate very much. Land is cheap in this county, and I'd hate to think of any one offering me a hundred thousand for all I own. I guess I gave that party the idea that I could buy Central Park if I wanted to."

"It was good of you to shoo them away," said Daisy gratefully. "They had me pretty badly scared. Now I've got something to keep away bad dreams: I'm glad to know about that chain across the road. As soon as competition comes near me, I'll beg you to hang out the chain and scare it away; it's like having a drawbridge and moat."

Oaks and Raleigh came in, bringing the solemn Jonas Strong with them. Raleigh was stiffly polite to Daisy nowadays, but he sat down with his two companions at Daisy's invitation.

"We have to consult you ladies about a matter of grave importance," Oaks announced, half humorously. "I guess we're secluded enough here at this table. It's about these beastly things in the newspaper. We're all doing a little amateur detective work on the quiet, and we think we have a clew at last."

"Don't look at me so accusingly," Kate objected. "If I told any newspaper all I

know, Beacon Bay would be depopulated in twenty-four hours."

"As a matter of fact, this is rather serious," said Oaks. "With very remarkable intelligence, Rex and I were inspired to visit Jonas at the post office. We have asked him to reveal certain official secrets in a good cause, and he is now wavering between conscience and grim duty. He says that if Miss Barton thinks he ought to tell, he will tell us who mails letters regularly to New York; that is, if any one outside the ranks of the trustworthy people does so."

"I've been faithful to my duty as postmaster for thirty-one years," Jonas declared grimly, "but if Miss Barton thinks I ought to give information, I'll do it, by crickey!"

"Sometimes it is right to use one's own judgment against mere official red tape, Jonas," said Miss Barton kindly. "If any of the servants have been mailing letters to New York newspapers, we ought to know it. And, of course, you won't be dragged into any public proceedings, Jonas."

The postman cast a furtive glance about the room, and drew his chair closer to the table.

"It's like pullin' teeth for me to tell this," he asserted regretfully, "for I vow I think the party is innocent o' crime. But if he's innocent it 'll do no harm. That nice young feller, Wyndham—he's been a mailin' long fat en-velopes to New York 'most every day all summer. Some days he drops 'em in early in the morning, an' other times he happens along late at night an' sticks 'em in the slot in the front door. They ain't addressed to no newspaper, but the name o' the same man and street addresses is on all o' 'em."

"We're obliged to you, Jonas," Oaks declared, "and we'll keep your name out of the investigation."

"It looks a little bad for Wyndham," said Raleigh. "Would you mind, Miss Smith, if we had him in here to question him a little—very politely and discreetly?"

"I should mind, very much," she replied quickly. "I don't think it looks at all bad for Wyndham. Hasn't he as good a right as any of us to mail letters to New York, without being suspected of something vile? I know he studies and reads a great deal. He may be working with one of those correspondence schools. He might be doing any one of a hundred very creditable

things. Why should I have him in here to question him?"

"Wyndham doesn't gossip with the servants," added Miss Barton, "and I don't know where he'd get all the scandal. I've always liked his face."

"It would be something," said Raleigh, "to establish his innocence."

"I'll have no part in it," Daisy declared stoutly.

"At such a time," persisted Raleigh, a little shrewdly, "one almost suspects his neighbor. We ought to clear the matter up. Pardon me, Miss Smith, and please don't misunderstand me; you have enjoyed rather more business here since these wretched articles appeared in the paper. You are the only person in town who has profited in any way by this awful publicity. It would be ghastly if any one suspected that you and your faithful employee had been using such methods for the sake of business."

"It is ghastly for you to suggest such a thing," she returned, "and I'll have nothing more to say about it."

"I'm sorry," murmured Raleigh, getting up. "I'm determined that this thing shall stop. We'll have to deal with Wyndham in our own way."

XVI

ONCE more Beacon Bay was in the throes of internecine warfare, for rumors were quickly wafted about that Daisy Smith had flown in a temper when the mere suggestion was made that she might have engineered a vicious campaign of publicity for the town, in order to bring business to her tea room. Opposing camps were quickly formed, and houses were divided against themselves.

Rex Raleigh was sarcastic, but noncommittal; Jerry Maddox threatened to lick any one that thought Miss Smith capable of such infamy; James Sylvester was horrified at the mere suggestion, and his wife raised her eyebrows and said that one could never tell what human beings might be capable of.

Kate Barton went into conference with Daisy on the subject.

"Why can't they drop it," Daisy demanded, "and avoid all this new unpleasantness? I don't care to know who the guilty party is."

"I do," Kate asserted, "and I'm doing my best to find out. I've been analyzing

the situation—working the thing out by elimination. I've thought of two young intellectuals in this neighborhood who have not been mentioned in those gas attacks—Roddy Delarbe and Faith Merriam. Why haven't they been mentioned?"

"Oh, it's impossible," Daisy declared. "They're incapable of it. And you forget that Irma Delarbe was treated brutally by the writer."

"Roddy's a lawyer—or thinks he is," said the other shrewdly. "Lawyers are trained in building up defenses. You say at once that he couldn't have done it because his sister was mentioned. Well, that proves the value of such a defense. Mind, I'm not accusing Roddy, but my system doesn't eliminate him. He needs money, I understand, and so does Faith Merriam. Faith is an unhappy, bitter girl, and just now she's disillusioned and rather sore at the world. Her idea of a good time is to see her fellow mortals hopping on a red-hot gridiron, because she's been grilled a good deal herself."

Miss Barton went on making her deductions and eliminations, and the attacks continued intermittently in the newspaper. A paragraph about nothing in particular mentioned: "A flabby pink-and-white mollycoddle, cowed into bovine gentleness by the wife with the serpent's tongue," and James Sylvester was grieved, and gently, silently furious.

Other newspapers commented upon the daring persecution of a community by a notoriously scandalous daily, and Slade, columnist of the New York *Arcturus*, wrote:

The vulnerability of the superior castes is exemplified in the inarticulate rage of the blue-stocking summer residents of Beacon Bay at the effrontery of a heckling, third-rate city daily. The yapping gutter pup delights in the frantic yowls of the high-caste Persian tabby in the tree.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Jerry Maddox, showing the paragraph to Daisy in the tea room. "I'm no aristocrat, but I keep my mouth shut when there's nothing to say."

"Miss Delarbe keeps her own counsel, too," Daisy observed reflectively. "I believe she's never murmured a protest against the wicked things that were said about her."

"Icicles don't talk much," Jerry said with a chuckle.

"But they thaw, when there's any warmth around them," she reminded him.

"Irma Delarbe is an uncomplaining victim of her environment, suffering in silence because she's too proud to talk. I wonder why somebody doesn't try being nice to her. The dancing master paid her compliments and made her laugh, and she became so human that she lost her dignity, and almost lost her reputation. Why doesn't some decent man of her own set try to make her laugh?"

"You may be right," said Jerry. "I never gave the matter much thought, but I hate to see people unhappy. I'll buy her a bunch of flowers, and call on her. I'll probably get the gate when she hears my name, but my conscience will be better off for the effort."

"That's good missionary work for my neighbors," reflected Daisy, after he had gone. "This town needs humanizing; I'll try it again."

So she singled out Faith Merriam as fair game at the earliest opportunity.

"What are you doing now for social uplift?" she asked Faith, with a disarming smile.

"I've quit dancing," said Faith gloomily. "Lost my taste for it, somehow. I've got to earn money pretty soon, too. This winter I may go in for arts and crafts; I've been reading William Morris stuff. I could earn money, and give people articles of enduring beauty in return."

"In the meantime," Daisy suggested, "why not add something to the gayety of the gloomy world? It isn't necessary to dance to make people cheerful. A laugh a-day might keep the doctor away. There's the poor Baron Osbert. He's crawled into his shell for protection against this exclusive and desirable society. They never laughed with him, but *at* him. If you want to do so much for humanity, why can't you experiment with a single specimen? Ask your mother to invite the poor baron to dinner; your mother is a very sympathetic person. He'll expand like a big butterfly in a little warmth, and if you'll be nice to him you may feel that you have done something for the race without much effort."

"I can try it once," Faith agreed; "but it's hard to thaw. I guess I'm cut out for cold, gray backgrounds."

"You walk by yourself too much, like Kipling's cat. Selfishness grows upon one pretty fast. Coöperation is the life of everything, and you'd better begin to coöperate on a small scale."

"I'm not sure that Kipling's cat didn't have the best of it, just the same," objected Faith, skeptically. "He walked by himself, and all things were alike to him. I coöperated with my dancing master—for truth and beauty, and he made me a laughing stock."

"It's not as bad as you think," said Daisy. "That wretched newspaper hasn't even mentioned your name."

"That's because I'm so insignificant—not worth a newspaper paragraph. It would be something to be roasted by a yellow journal as a prominent member of society."

She spoke listlessly, and was not perceptibly interested in the newspaper affair, and Daisy felt assured that Kate Barton's speculations regarding her possible connection with it were groundless.

Roddy Delarbe was now the busiest of all the idlers in town, socially and semi-professionally. There was a dearth of young bachelors, for they had been drawn away season by season to resorts where life was faster and more vivid; and with Rex Raleigh on the verge of being *persona non grata* at a number of houses, Roddy felt with an agreeable thrill that he was tacitly called to be the leader of the younger unmarried set.

The work of espionage that he had volunteered to assume seemed also of grave importance to him: if there were a traitor in the erstwhile impregnable camp, and he could lay him by the heels, the harassing newspaper might be silenced, and gratitude and glory would be the portion of the amateur sleuth.

In contrast with Raleigh, frivolous and fickle, Roddy now appeared in the ascendant as an eligible young man, more aristocratic than opulent, but distinctly safe, and the Sylvesters received him cordially and smiled upon his polite attentions to Marian. That damsel had come to be regarded by a severe mother as something of an *enfant terrible*, and the attentions of a safe young man were viewed with approval.

Once more Daisy was visited by a committee, this time composed of Oaks, Mad-dox, and Delarbe, and they were solemnly polite and ominous.

"We wouldn't annoy you unnecessarily for the world, Miss Smith," Oaks assured her, "but we felt that you should be told of the new developments. Mr. Delarbe has made a discovery."

"It may seem very underhanded on my

part," Roddy added, "but to accomplish anything at all in an investigation, one has to resort to undignified methods. I secretly removed two rubbish barrels from the rear of your house last night, and examined their contents. I think the method was justified by the result, for I found that a rather accomplished newspaper writer had been careless enough to throw evidence of his work into that rubbish."

"Suppose we send for Wyndham?" suggested Oaks.

"I've no objection," said Daisy frigidly. "I think he will probably be glad to speak for himself."

Wyndham came presently, and Daisy asked him to sit down and hear what the gentlemen had to say.

"This is not a court," Delarbe began with some professional gravity, "and you are not obliged to answer any questions that you object to; but—would you mind telling me if this is your handwriting?"

The gentlemanly chauffeur was surprised, and he flushed.

"Certainly it is my writing," he answered. "What of it?"

"It is something that was evidently written to be published, and probably in a newspaper, but was discarded and thrown away. We are anxious to know if you regularly correspond with newspapers."

"We can come to the point with very little trouble," Wyndham said curtly. "I did not write the stuff that has been agitating this place. Beyond that, I can't tell you anything that could possibly interest you."

"Hold on! Let's not be too hasty," counseled Oaks. "We assume that the objectionable matter in the paper was written by a newspaper man; but we can't therefore assume that if you're a newspaper man you must have written it. However, journalists are rare birds in Beacon Bay, and it will help us to relieve you of any possible suspicion if you'll tell us what you do write, Mr. Wyndham."

"I'm tempted to answer, like *Hamlet*, 'Words, words!'" the young man replied.

"You're too flippancy by half, sir," protested Roddy Delarbe. "How can we help but suspect you? You've chosen to be a person of mystery here all summer, exciting curiosity, posing as a laboring man, and you're inclined to be resentful when we ask you questions. You can't bluff us, you know, and if we find out that you're the

man we're looking for, you'd better plan to get out of Beacon Bay faster than you ever traveled before."

"We're giving you a chance," explained Jerry Maddox kindly. "If you're a poor young man, down on your luck, and you've been making some money on that stuff, why, other fools have done such things before. We might be easy on you and let you off, so long as you kept away from here in the future."

"If you have talent," said Oaks, "you might have turned it to better uses. You made a favorable impression on us here, until now."

"That's what I'm drivin' at," resumed Jerry. "You have the look of a good feller. You ought to take pride in your talent if you've got it. It's a noble profession. I read to Miss Smith a piece about this Beacon Bay fuss in the New York *Arcturus*; it's written by Slade, in his own column. There's a man to pattern yourself on, my friend. He speaks like a justice o' the Supreme Court, lookin' out over the pinheads of all the little shysters runnin' around down below. I should think you'd like to be such a man as that."

"He's not so much," said Wyndham, slowly and wearily.

"I don't care for your indifference, young man," Oaks remarked indignantly.

"It's no credit to you; it's sheer bad taste."

"You might put it down to modesty," said Wyndham.

"Modesty!" snarled Jerry Maddox.

"What d'ye mean, modesty?"

"I *am* Slade," said the young man.

"Richard Wyndham Slade."

XVII

BEACON BAY's season was drawing to a close, and there were mysteries still unsolved. The wielder of the poison pen was still wielding it intermittently. Richard Wyndham Slade still insisted on being a chauffeur. Daisy Smith had made a success of Miss Smith's Tea Room, but she had not relieved the community's curiosity as to her identity.

Roddy Delarbe made a reckless wager with Jerry Maddox—a gaited saddle horse against a motor boat—that he would land the unknown scribbler before the season closed; and then Daisy Smith took definite action.

She went up to the Turrets one morning, approaching the august portals for the first

time, and the astonished Mrs. Sylvester granted her an audience.

"You'll maybe forgive me, and maybe not," said Daisy, "but I'm doing the right thing, as I see it. It's about that newspaper matter."

"What in the world!" gasped the lady. "What have I to do with it?"

"It's got to be stopped before there's a perfectly frightful scandal," Daisy replied. "And I think you might stop it, Mrs. Sylvester, if you would give your daughter Marian a sound spanking."

"Miss Smith," indignantly cried the lady, rising abruptly.

"Your daughter is the mysterious correspondent," Daisy informed her. "It had to be cleared up, to save people's nerves. I got my chauffeur, the distinguished journalist, to make inquiries secretly through his newspaper connections, and he has reported confidentially that Miss Marian Sylvester has supplied the offensive gossip to the offensive paper."

Mrs. Sylvester sat down again.

"Are we to be blackmailed?" she gasped. "Or will it be ostracism? What will be done about it?"

"Nothing, I hope. That's why I came here—to save your daughter. Mr. Slade—my chauffeur—assures me that his information is authentic. Mr. Delarbe must be restrained in his investigating activities before he actually finds out something; then your daughter must be kept from further mischief."

"Who else knows of this?"

"No one else has had a chance to know. My chauffeur is the modern Sphinx, and I have not even told Miss Barton."

"There is a great deal of kindness in the world," said Anne Sylvester, and actually smiled in a restrained manner. "I shall never forget this, Miss Smith—your tact, your consideration, your great charity. And my daughter will never forget the hour that I am about to spend with her in private, if you'll excuse me, my dear."

Daisy's car was waiting, and as the chauffeur drove her down to the town below the bluffs, she stopped to pick up Kate Barton and Faith Merriam, who were walking together.

"How lovely your frock is," she said to Faith, who was blooming in flowery pink silk with ribbons galore.

"I'm not accustomed to the style," Faith replied, and blushed amazingly. "Rudolph

dislikes the severe tailor-mades, and adores these silly fripperies."

"Ah, Rudolph!" exclaimed Daisy.

"She has fallen prey to an aristocrat," said Kate Barton, "this wild Bolshevik maiden!"

"I never understood him until you explained him to me," Faith confessed humbly to Daisy. "Real nobility is so rare! Mother and I are going to Washington after we close the house, and Rudolph and I shall be married in the fall."

"You'll have a castle in the Balkans, my dear!" cried Daisy, embracing her in wild delight.

"There'll be a proletariat, too," Miss Barton pointed out, "and I've read that they wear goatskins and drink sour milk."

"The proletariat must be instructed and led," said Faith, looking inspired. "That is the function of the real nobility—leadership. Rudolph is adored by the peasants at his home."

Daisy dropped the two women at their respective homes.

"I shan't be a chauffeur much longer," Richard Wyndham Slade remarked—and it was positive loquacity for him. "Would you like to drive into the country to see the last of the summer?"

"If you think you could talk," Daisy answered sarcastically, "it would be charming."

They turned toward the inland woods and fields, after Daisy had joined him on the front seat for sociability's sake, and as they drove out of town they met Irma Delarbe and Jerry Maddox, strolling. Jerry was talking, with his peculiar twisted grin, and Irma was seen to laugh, before she knew that she was observed.

"Another one of your enterprises?" inquired Slade. His continued audacity was astonishing.

"I sincerely hope so," laughed Daisy. "It's near the fall of the year, but sometimes a young man's fancy can be turned, by proper direction."

"You're such a young fairy godmother!" he remarked. "But I must say that you've never meddled with my destiny. Women are so curious, but you have never asked me why I preferred to be a gardener, or a chauffeur."

"Perhaps I was afraid that you wanted me to ask you."

"Oh, but I didn't. I never like to be asked things until I'm ready to tell."

"Let me know when you're ready, and I'll ask," Daisy suggested.

"The time is getting short now," he declared, seriously, "and I've got to tell, whether you ask or not."

Daisy blushed and fidgeted with the door handle.

"You're such a quietly superior, self-contained young man," she said. "But since you were found out, since I learned that you were a distinguished journalist, I have puzzled it out that you came here to be let alone. The intellectuals always crave solitude, I know, and there's no solitude for anybody but a humble workingman. That's the way I've figured you out."

"That's right as far as it goes," he admitted; "but why should one wish to be a solitary workingman in Beacon Bay, where work is unknown? I only got my job by a miracle, and I had no hope of getting one. I couldn't have been a butler or a lackey in any of the palaces, for those servants have their own social life, and it's worse than their masters'."

"Well, if I must ask," said Daisy, "why did you want to come to Beacon Bay?"

"And if I must tell you," he answered, "it was because I happened to see you, when you were buying your ticket for Beacon Bay in the Grand Central Station."

Daisy scowled at him in sheer vexation.

"What a let-down!" she groaned. "I didn't expect that from *you*! Love at first sight is so hackneyed!"

"Please don't be too hasty," he protested. "You see, I didn't fall in love with you."

"Oh!"

"No, I merely thought that I might fall in love with you. You were the prettiest girl that I had ever seen, and sometimes pretty girls have brains, and wit, and judgment, and a certain Christian charity. I looked at you in the Grand Central Station, and thought what a pity it would be if you happened to have all those virtues, and I should never see you again. So I listened, when you bought your ticket, and decided that you were one of the summer residents here. I came out here a few days later, and found you here; then I asked Jonas Strong for a job, to get an excuse to stay, and then by a miracle I became your gardener."

"How fortunate it was for me," said Daisy, with rather cool irony, "that I never suspected I was on probation all summer."

It would have made me very ill at ease, I'm sure."

"That was my scheme, you see," he explained. "Married persons never know each other until after marriage, for they're always parading on their best behavior until the contract is sealed. I was pretty certain that a woman wouldn't be a heroine to her hired man unless she possessed an exceptional character."

"Is it necessary to add," he asked, "that you passed the examination with a rating of one hundred per cent?"

"That is so gratifying," she said pertly.

He seemed a little staggered, and they rode for a moment in awkward silence.

"I've been thinking of offering you your present position for next summer," she said, practically. "You make a very good impression, Mr. Slade, and if I had you for a chauffeur all next summer, it would give me a chance to observe your character and personality. You have a good face. In fact, you are a handsome young man. Some good-looking men have also good tempers, good habits, and are not conceited. Some of the masculine virtues are so rare that it would be a pity if you happened to have them, and I never had a chance to find it out."

"I'm properly rebuked," he acknowledged. Then: "Daisy Smith, I'll work for you next summer, or for ten more summers, if there's half a chance of your taking me at the end of the test."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "I thought lovers were impatient. Are you sure that you're not cut out for a confirmed bachelor, Mr. Slade?"

He had been driving slowly, but now he stopped the car and turned to face her.

"Look here!" he said with desperate earnestness. "I'm really not the conceited, cold-blooded cur that I've evidently made myself out to be. I suppose a man always makes a fool of himself when he's in love. I'm not even claiming that I've any right to ask you to marry me. I only know that I want you."

"Really! How flattering," Daisy remarked, in mock surprise.

"I'm not a superior person at all; I'm far below the average—and *you* are unique, Daisy Smith, in beauty and in character," Mr. Slade continued, steadily. "You've probably got money, and family, and social position, and everything. I haven't asked you where you came from or who

you are, you'll notice. I'm merely a passably successful newspaper man at present, with nothing but my salary; and you are, right here and now, a very successful business woman. That's where I stand, and I'm very miserable when I think of it."

"No doubt!" Miss Smith agreed, too readily.

"I suppose it was sheer impudence for me to tell you all this, and even assume the possibility of your marrying a doubtful proposition like me," he concluded, not to be side-tracked by her interruptions. "It's up to me, I guess, to go out and make a name for myself, and get something more than a weekly pay envelope, before I set myself up to dream of heavenly bliss. Now you know how I feel about it, I hope. I'm a mere nobody, with a little second-rate talent for writing, and I might get writer's cramp or brain fog any day."

"We should have the tea room to fall back on," said Daisy.

It was very fitting, Mrs. Sylvester believed, that one of the closing scenes of the summer season should be at the Turrets, and she gave a dinner which, it was quite generally understood, was for the purpose of making a formal announcement of the betrothal of her daughter Marian and Mr. Roderick Delarbe. In times past it had been no uncommon thing for the season of outdoor gayety and sport to terminate with the official sanction upon a number of sprightly romances, and it seemed like a harking back to the days when Beacon Bay was lively with young people, and yachts, and tally-hos and tandems, to have four newly engaged couples to dinner in the spacious dining room of the Turrets.

Faith Merriam and her gently bearlike Baron Osbert were there, and Irma Delarbe came out of her retirement very graciously, because she had just accepted a homely proposal from the rough-and-ready Jerry Maddox.

It was unusual for a chauffeur and a tea room lady to be entertained at the Turrets, but Richard Wyndham Slade was invited because he was also a distinguished journalist, and Daisy Smith was there because Mrs. Anne Sylvester desired it to be known that she had accepted her as a friend, and was willing to admit her publicly to membership in the inner circle, as Miss Smith or the future Mrs. Slade.

Roddy and Marian were the most recently engaged pair, so they came in for felicitations and more or less humorous chaffing.

"Your Mr. Slade needn't fear that I'm pussyfooting on his trail any more," said Roddy to Daisy Smith, "for I've quit sleuthing. I had to turn over my best saddle horse to Jerry, for that was the bet; but an engaged man hasn't any time to be a detective."

"As a matter of fact," he added confidentially, "my future mother-in-law put the kibosh on that business. The newspaper hasn't published any of that stuff lately, and Mrs. Sylvester said that unless I gave up the hunt and ignored all that silly stuff, I couldn't have Marian. A bargain's a bargain, and I didn't begrudge the saddle horse."

Daisy said nothing to that, and he wondered why she smiled so broadly.

At the table Anne Sylvester bloomed again as a hostess, and smiled with ironical friendliness at her ancient enemy, Kate Barton, across the table. All personal feuds were put away in lavender for the winter, and the mellow gayety of the harvest season prevailed.

Mrs. Sylvester, smiling beatifically at Daisy, remarked:

"She must return again to her tea room, to renew her influence upon us worldlings, until we can see the things about us as she sees them. I feel, dear friends, that we are all happy to-night, because Daisy Smith came among us bringing fresh drafts of youth and good will."

"For all we know, she's going back to Fairyland," grumbled Kate Barton. "She's still a mystery!"

"My mystery," said Daisy simply, "is that I have no mystery. There's no disguise so complete as obscurity; and mystery serves as an attractive background when you're trying to build something out of nothing. If you must have my story, it's a short one:

"My father is a farmer in Ohio. He managed to give me an education. I was a school-teacher, and I wanted to make my world larger than it was, but I didn't think of marriage, or the movies, or the stage. I decided to be a business woman, and open a tea room in some place where there were no tea rooms, so here I am in Beacon Bay. My father's name is Sam Smith, and I'm—for the present—just Daisy."